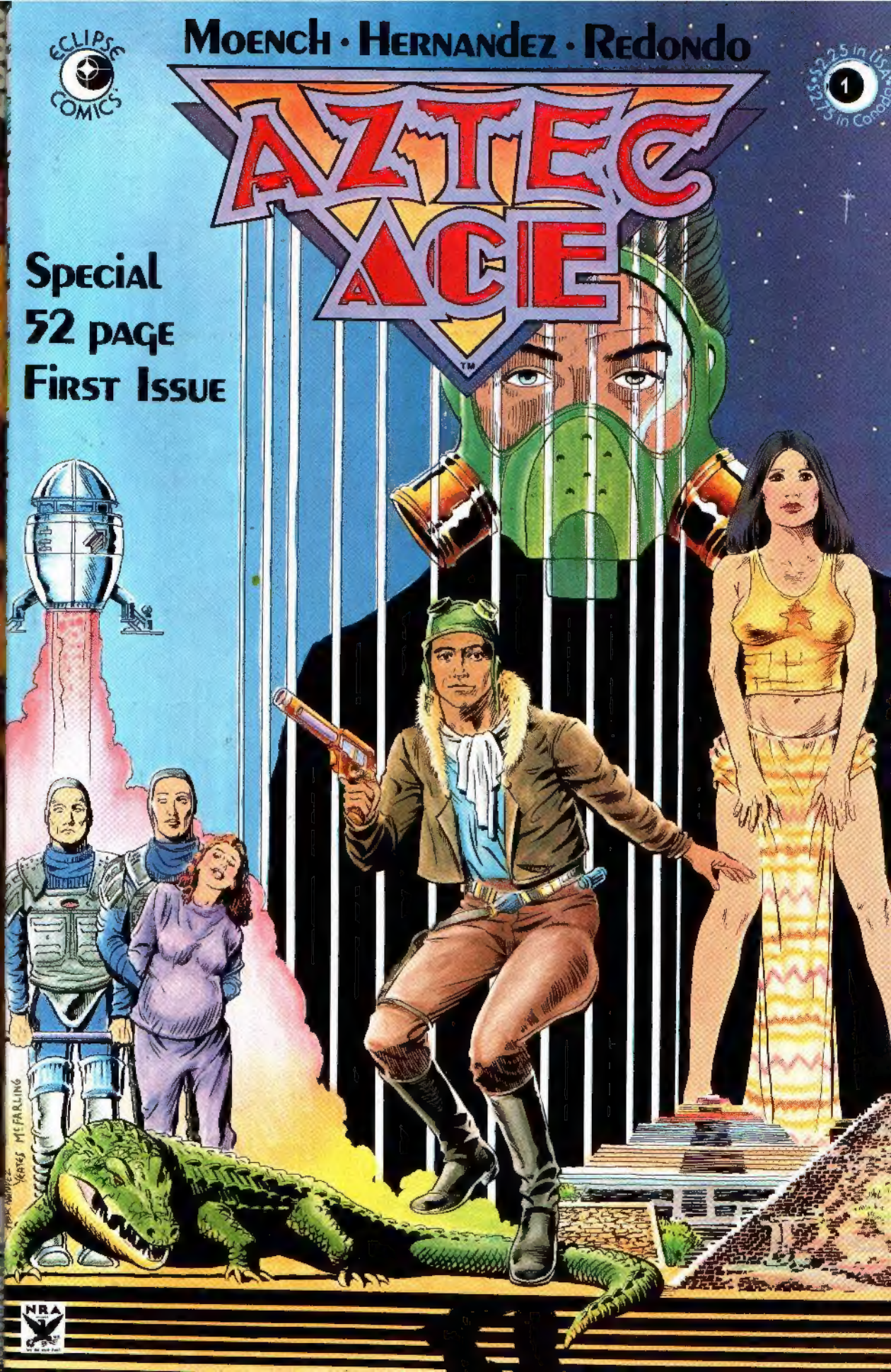
ECLIPSE COMICS
MOENCH · HERNANDEZ · REDONDO
AZTEC ACE
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Special
52 page
First Issue
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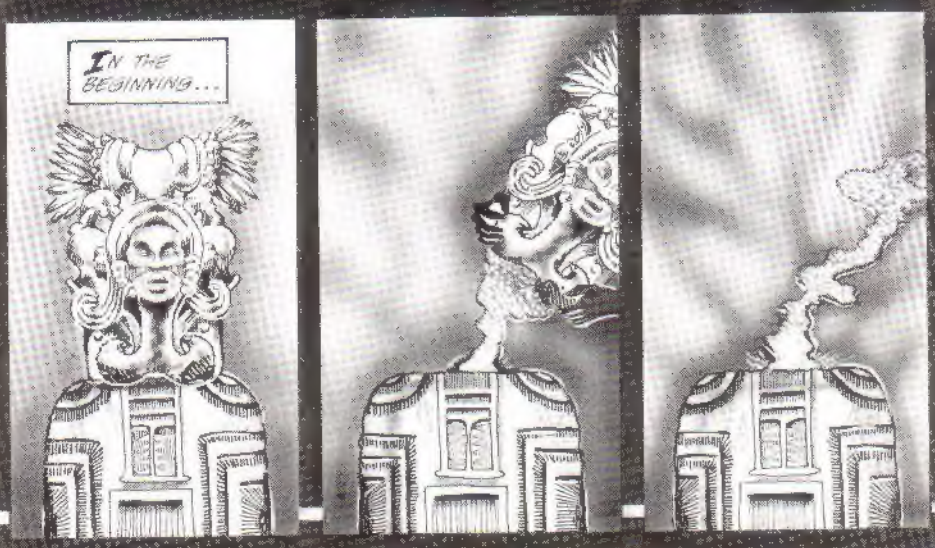

THE MEXICA SERPENT

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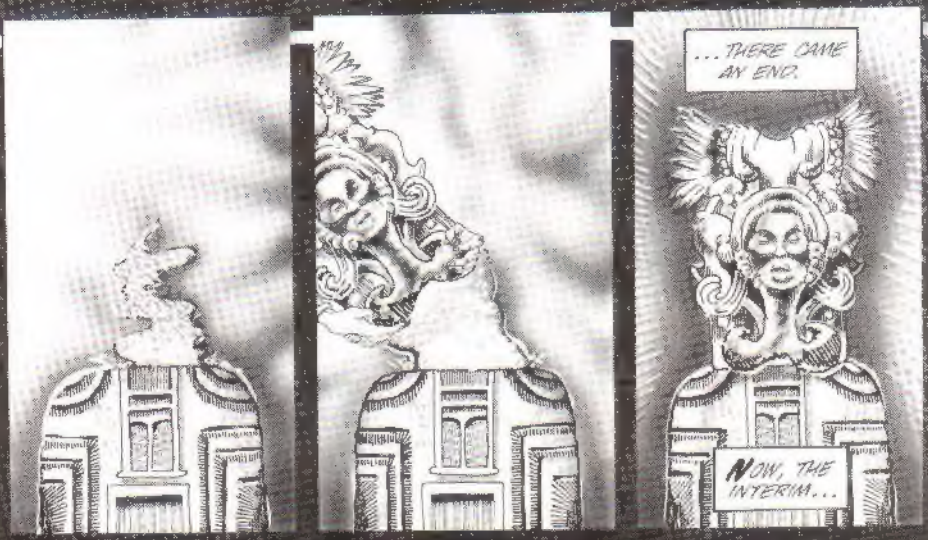


MONTEZUMA CONTERMINOUS:
TENOCHTITLAN, CIRCA 1518...
I LINGER IN THE HIGH GARDENS OF TENOCHTITLAN, ISLAND CITY WHICH IS THE HEART OF THE ONE WORLD, AND I LISTEN TO THE BREATH OF YOALI EHÉCATL, THE CAPRICIOUS NIGHT WIND WHO OFTEN SEIZES NOCTURNAL TRAVELERS AND WHO SOMETIMES RELEASES THEM TOO.
MY NAPE IS STIRRED BY ANOTHER NIGHT DENIZEN, CHACACIUATL, THE WEEPING WOMAN, FIRST OF ALL MOTHERS TO DIE IN CHILDBIRTH, WHO FOREVER HAUNTS THE NIGHT, BEWAILING HER LOST BABY AND HER OWN LOST LIFE.
AND, TOO, I SENSE THE PRESENCE OF THE "ILTH EATER TLAZOLTÉOTL, THE COMPASSIONATE GODDESS TO WHOM MEN CONFESS AND WHO DEVOURS THE UNBURDENED SINS, THUS CLEANSING THE CONFESSOR.
I BELIEVE IN NONE OF THESE GODS, YET I AM PLEASED THAT I SENSE NO HEADLESS AND LIMBLESS TORSOS WRITHING ON THE GROUND, NO SKULLS DRIFTING HEAD-HIGH THROUGH THE MOONLIGHT...
DIRE OMENS I CAN DO WITHOUT.

THE CEREMONY OF QUETZALCOATL WILL BEGIN IN A MATTER OF HOURS.
I DESCEND THE HILL AS A BONE FLUTE TRILLS IN THE DISTANCE...
...AND AS A SHINBONE IS STRUCK AGAINST HUMAN SKIN STRETCHED OVER A DRUM.
HERE IN THE QUARTER OF THE CITY RESERVED FOR PIPILTIN NOBILITY, I DECIDE IT IS TIME TO ENTER MY ICPAC TLAMANACALI PYRAMID-DWELLING--
--WHERE IN THE EMBRACE OF COOL LIMESTONE I SHALL TRY TO EXPLAIN TO BRIDGET ABOUT TIME...
TIME...AND WHAT IT MEANS TO SOMEONE WHO HAS ACCESS TO ALL OF IT, AND WHO MUST USE PIECES OF IT TO HEAL THE WHOLE, THUS PREVENTING THE INTERSTICES FROM BEING DISINTEGRATED.
NO, NOT YET.
CACAO AND ORCHID VANILLA, NOT TO MENTION TLAXCALA TORITILLAS, ARE FINE...
...BUT RIGHT NOW...
--NOT TO MENTION TLAXCALA TORTILLAS, ARE FINE, BUT RIGHT NOW...
OOPS--STILL TWELVE SECONDS OFF, DAMMIT.
TZHIN

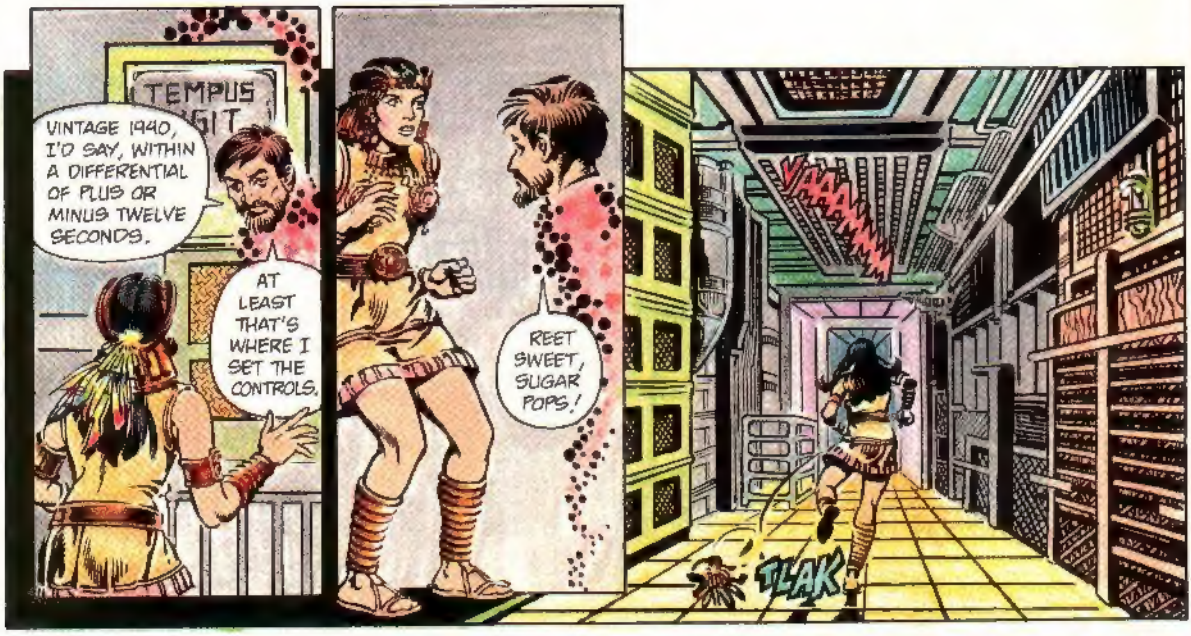
HAVE TO NAG TEMPUS FUGIT ABOUT FIXING THAT...
THE LAZY HEAD!
AH, WELL, BACK WE GO...
TZIIN
...AND FORWARD WE COME, PLUS TWELVE SECONDS.
THAT'S BETTER.
--BUT RIGHT NOW, NOTHING LESS THAN A MUNCHED BUNCH WILL DO.
AND NOW, MY LITTLE TIME-LOST BRIDGET--
--TIME FOR ANOTHER DISORIENTATION LESSON...
(MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE COME IN AS TWINS: VISUAL AID, AS WELL AS TWO TEACHERS PER PUPIL...
(BUT THEN, IT MIGHT HAVE CAUSED A FIGHT OVER THE FRITOS--AND I'M HAROLY FOND OF BLOODYING MY OWN NOSE...)
AHHH...MAYBE THIS AZTEC JAZZ WON'T TAKE MUCH GETTING USED TO.
YOU DAMES ARE GOOD AT THIS HAND-MAIDEN STUFF, Y'KNOW THAT? ALL WE NEED IS SOME CHAMPAGNE AND--
MUNCH CRUNCH CHOFF
--EATS?

OH MY GOD-- IS HE COMING IN HERE--?!
WITH HIS EYES OPEN?!
HEE
AYYO-- HAHAH.
HELLO, BRIDGET, ARE YOU--
OH SHIT.
AH...YOU'RE NOT FINISHED.
YOU LIKE LONG BATHS, DO YOU?
OH HELL, THIS THING'S JUST TOO SMALL--
--AND YOU AND ME ARE GONNA GET IT ON SOONER OR LATER ANYWAY, RIGHT?
SO WHAT THE HEY, ACEY-DEUCE.
UH...BOTH.
WELL, THEY ARE A MATCHED PAIR...
NO. I MEANT BOTH SOONER AND LATER.
OH.
YEAH.
BUT IF YOU DON'T MIND, THIS IS ALL A BIT MUCH, Y'KNOW? SHOCKS LIKE THIS TAKE SOME GETTING USED TO, ACE...
BUT HOW 'BOUT THE GAMS? Y'LIKE THEM TOO?
IN THE COURSE OF HISTORY, BRIDGET, SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE, AND THE APPEAL OF LIMBS IS HARDLY EXCLUDED.
I LIKE THEM VERY MUCH.
NOW...

...TOLANDA AND ZYANYA WILL DRESS YOU.
I'LL BE IN THE AZURE CROSSTIME EXPRESS.
YEAH? BUT WHERE WILL THAT BE?
OR SHOULD I SAY...WHEN WILL THAT BE?
NO ANSWER.
Y'KNOW, THAT ACE IS KINDA RUDE SOMETIMES, BUT I THINK HE WAS ACTUALLY FLUSTERED BY--
HEY, HOLD IT NOW--YOU AZTEC DAMES ARE REAL SWEET TRICKS, BUT I DON'T WANNA BE GUSSIED UP TO A PRECISE MATCH--
WHAT IS THAT GOOP?
THE BLOOD OF TLATLI.
THE BLOOD OF...
WHAT'S A TUH-LOT-LEE?
THE BUILDER OF THIS PYRAMID, COMPLETED JUST YESTERDAY.
WHEN HIS WORK WAS DONE HE OFFERED HIMSELF UP IN SACRIFICE TO THE GODS WHO MADE IT POSSIBLE.
HIS BLOOD WILL MAKE YOUR HAIR A COLOR FAVORED BY THE GODS, AND HOLD IT IN A PLEASING SHAPE...
YUGH.
DON'T YOU JUST HAVE SOME BLEACH AND A CURLING IRON?
WILL THESE OFFEND YOU AS WELL, BRIJ-ET?
HUH--?! ARE YOU KIDDING, SISTER?!
HOOO, DO YOU TWISTS REALIZE THE TURNOVER I COULD RAKE ON THIS STUFF IN MY SHOP?
TALK ABOUT FORT KNOX...!

CROSSING NO TIME (JUST HANGING OUT) IN THE AZURE EXPRESS
TEMPUS FUGIT
HEY, TEMPUS?
YOU IN THERE?
TEMPUS FUGIT
I'M LISTENING TO MUSIC. WHAT DO YOU WANT?
HEAD--?
I'VE ALREADY TOLD YOU THREE TIMES--THE AUTOMATIC RETURN IS OFF BY TWELVE SECONDS.
I KNOW, I KNOW...
TEMPUS FUGIT
THEN FIX IT!
OUGHT TO PUT HIM ON A SLOW FREIGHT TRAIN TO THE CRETACEOUS.
"LISTENING TO MUSIC."
SO WHAT ELSE WOULD A HEAD DO? I GUESS WE ALL NEED OUR SOLACE...
I GET MINE HERE--IN THE ANACHRONY DEN, SOFTLY BEATING MY HEAD AGAINST THE MOMENT OF MY CHOICE.

RIGHT NOW, I WAS IN A 20TH CENTURY FIFTIES-SIXTIES MOOD...
STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THE KILLER THIRST CREATED BY THIS CLIMATE...
"LISTENING TO MUSIC."
SPLAT
ACTUALLY... NOT A BAD IDEA AT ALL.
A LITTLE B-12...
TWO MINUTES THIRTY-THREE SECONDS OF C-8--AND A JOLT OF D-7...
BETTER THAN WHAT THEY'LL COME TO CALL "VITAMINS."
HERE'S MY STORY, IT'S SAD BUT TRUE, ABOUT A GIRL THAT I ONCE KNEW; SHE TOOK MY LOVE AND THEN RAN AROUND, WITH EVERY SINGLE GUY IN TOWN...
HEY, HEY, WHOA-OH-OH OH-OH-OH, HEY...
A-KEEP AWAY FROM RUNAROUND SUE...
HARD TO BELIEVE ALL THIS STUFF ON THE INSIDE CAN FIT INSIDE SUCH A SMALL EGG...
HEY, ZEK?
ACE--?
YOU HERE, HONEY?
HMMM...DON'T REMEMBER SEEING THAT GEEK BEFORE.
BETTER WATCH THAT TEMPER, TOOTS --LIABLE TO LOSE YOUR HEAD...
HUH?
TEMPUS FUDGE-IT...?
TEMPUS FUGIT
CLOSE ENOUGH--AND YOU MUST BE THE ACE'S NEW SQUEEZE.


TEMPUS
VINTAGE 1940, I'D SAY, WITHIN A DIFFERENTIAL OF PLUS OR MINUS TWELVE SECONDS.
AT LEAST THAT'S WHERE I SET THE CONTROLS.
REET SWEET, SUGAR POPS!
YAAAAAWWN
TLAK

ICON-MIX YOU ANYTHING BUT LOVE, BABY
IN HERE, BRIDGET.

IN THE B-B-BOX OUT THERE...
THAT'S JUST THE HEAD I TOLD YOU ABOUT.

YEAH, B-BUT... WELL, I THOUGHT HE WAS SOME KIND OF MACHINE.
IN A WAY, HE IS.
YEAH...? BUT I MEAN LIKE IN THOSE DIME MAGAZINES WITH THE ROUGH EDGES AND TOOTY COVERS.

THE ESS-EFF PULPS? OH, NO, HE'S NOT LIKE THAT.
JUST DON'T EVER CALL HIM SIGGIE AND YOU'LL GET ALONG FINE.
BESIDES, HE STAYS IN HIS BOX MOST OF THE TIME--INSECURITY.

AND SPEAKING OF "STAY," SIT DOWN--MAURICE WILLIAMS IS C-8, COMING UP NEXT.
EVER HEAR IT?

HEAR WHAT?
NEVER MIND...

YOU'D BE PAST FORTY IF YOU'D CHOSEN TO REACH THE EARLY SIXTIES.
OH, WON'T YOU STAY, AHHH, JUST A LITTLE BIT LONGER...
SHE LOOKED CONFUSED AS SHE GAZED AROUND AT THE WEALTH OF ANACHRONISM.

SO I DECIDE TO BROACH IT...
WHAT WAS RINALDO LIKE?
HUH?
"OH, YOU MEAN..." WELL, HE WAS CRUEL ...BUT IN A SLICK WAY, LIKE A GENTLEMAN."
DID YOU LIKE IT LIKE THAT?
WELL...
YES.
I THOUGHT AND THINK ABOUT THAT
SHE COULD TELL, SO HER KNEE TOUCHED MY THIGH
BUT THAT WAS BEFORE I KNEW ANY BETTER
SURELY HE WASN'T YOUR FIRST?
NO..BUT THE OTHERS WERE JUST BORING, WHICH IS WHY RINALDO STOOD OUT
YOU STAND OUT TOO - THE OTHER WAY
I LOOK AT HER AND SHE IS BEAUTIFUL. SO I TRY TO BE CASUAL IN TIME WITH THE MUSIC...
BRIDGET, DO YOU LIE?
OF COURSE
SAY, THAT'S PRETTY HOT JAZZ YOU GOT OVER THERE--NEVER HEARD THESE TUNES BEFORE..
ARE YOU LYING NOW?
IF I SAID NO, YOU'D NEVER KNOW. AND IF I SAID YES...
PLEASE SAY-HEY YOU WILL, OH WON'T YOU STAY...
DON'T SUPPOSE YOU HAVE ANY JUICY FRUIT AROUND?
JUST THE GUM-BALL MACHINE OVER BY THAT SUNDIAL--NO COINS NECESSARY.

SO WHEN YOU GONNA SHOW ME AROUND THE CITY?
NUTS
WHEN MY SELECTIONS ARE PLAYED OUT
FAR ENOUGH
MIND IF I POKE AROUND THE...UM, AZURE CROSSTIME EXPRESS 'TIL YOU'RE READY?
FEEL FREE...BUT TOUCH NOTHING UNTIL YOU'RE KEN-HIP TO FUNCTION AND REPERCUSSION.
PARADOX IS ANATHEMA.
AH...SURE, SURE.. WHATEVER YOU SAY, ACEY-DEUCE.
I'M A-WALKIN' IN THE RAIN, TEARS ARE FALLIN' AND I FEEL A PAIN...
DID SHE KNOW TOO MUCH ALREADY?
WAS IT AN ACT, OR WAS I WRONG TO EXPECT MORE OF A MIND-BLOW?
.. A-WISHIN' YOU WERE HERE BY ME, TO END THIS MISERY...
I FLIPPED OPEN MY SCRAMBACK--
--DECIDING I MIGHT AS WELL GET IT ALL DOWN FOR HEAD'S FILES...
...AN' I WONDER, I WHY-WHY-WHY-WHY-WONDER; A-WHY, A-WHY-WHY-WHY-WHY-WHY, SHE RAN AWAY AND I WONDER WHERE SHE WILL STAY MY LITTLE RUNAWAY, A-RUN-RUN RUN RUN RUNAWAY...
IT ALL BEGAN FOUR HUNDRED YEARS LATER IN SAN FRANCISCO--
BACK IN THE FUTURE
"I WAS HARDLY LOOKING FORWARD TO A NEW YEAR, AND BESIDES, I HADN'T YET TIED A FINAL RIBBON AROUND THE COLD HARD PIECE AT HAND...
T.A. ZECK
PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR
505
"--WITH THE END OF A CASE I WAS WRAPPING UP LIKE A PRETTY BOX NEAR THE TAIL END OF DECEMBER.
ALL RIGHT, ZEK--WHERE'S THE REAL SNAKE?
"THE GUNSEL WAS A CHEAP PUNK WITH A REAL KNACK FOR THE $41,000-DOLLAR QUESTION...

"I HID TREMBLING FINGERS BEHIND A COOL HEAD...
WHAT REAL SNAKE?
YOU ITCHIN' TO GET BIT?
DON'T GET WISE WITH ME, ZEK!
SOMEHOW YOU WORKED A SWITCH--THE TWIST ALREADY TOLD ME--SO I'D GET THIS PHONY SNAKE
THIS ROD'S IN MY HAND BECAUSE I WANT THE REAL ONE THE ONE THAT GLITTERS LIKE GOLD BECAUSE IT IS GOLD
"I MADE MY LIDS HEAVY OVER EYES CLOUDY AND BORED...
IT'S GOT FEATHERS, RINALDO
MAYBE IT FLEW AWAY.
ONE MORE CHUCKLE'S ALL MY TRIGGER CAN TAKE, ZEK.
NOW SPIT IT OUT--UNLESS YOU WANNA LEAVE MOST OF YOUR HEART SMEARED ON YOUR DESK!
"I NEVER MISS MY CUE; IT WAS TIME TO START BUILDING MY IMPUDENT ACT...
LISTEN TO ME, RINALDO - MAYBE YOU KNOW THE IMPORTANCE OF WHAT YOU'RE DEALING WITH AND MAYBE YOU DON'T.
I DON'T CARE BECAUSE I DO, AND IT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE BOTH OF US - INCLUDING ALL OUR HAIRY ANCESTORS RIGHT BACK TO THE STONE AGE!
THAT ADDS UP TO ONE FACT YOU SLIMY GREASEBALL.
I'VE GOT TO GET QUETZALCOATL BACK TO MY CLIENTS -- AND TIME'S RUNNING OUT!
YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME, THEN POP YOUR EYES TO THE REAR --
-- AND SEE WHAT I MEAN.

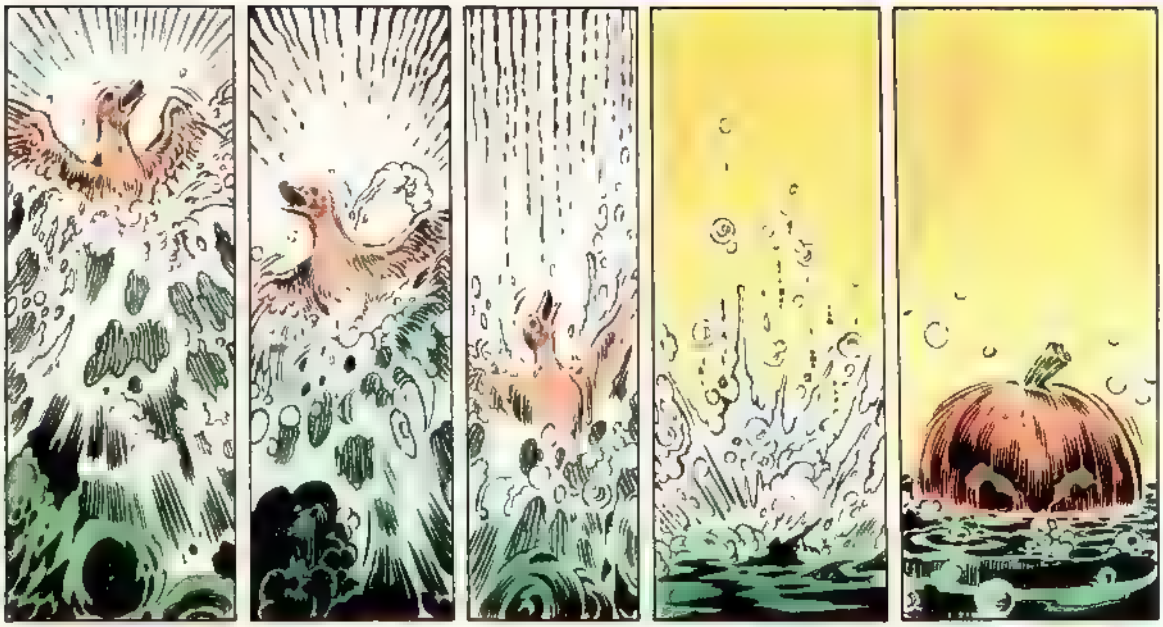
HIS ROD SNEEZED KA-CHEE!
WHA--?!
EEEK! EEEK!
SHOT
KA-CHEE
"SO I HELD THE GUN ON HIM FOR MY FAVORITE PART: SUMMING UP THE CASE..
- ONLY YOU COULDN'T KNOW THE BRIDGET KRONOPOULOUS DAME WOULD FALL FOR ME... AND HELP ME SPRING THIS TRAP ON YOU, YA POOR SAP
"THEN I TOOK THE BOTTLE FROM ITS THIRD DRAWER BERTH--
"COULDN'T HAVE TIMED IT BETTER MYSELF.
BUKSH
" AND CHRISTENED QUETZALCOATL REBORN.

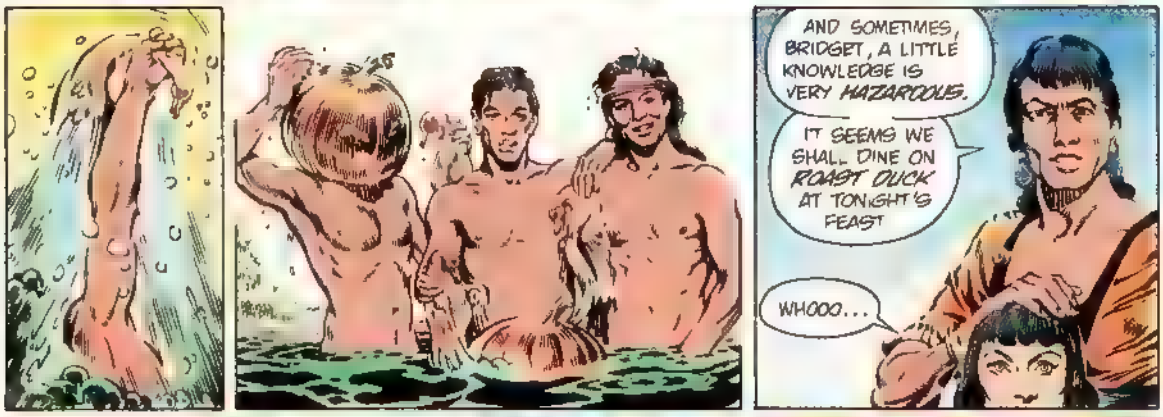
"BOOZE IS ASTRINGENT IN ANY ERA.
WHAT THE--? DARK STUFF--WASHIN' OFF, AND.
GOLD--IT WAS THE REAL STATUE ALL ALONG!
OKAY BOYS, YOU CAN COME ON IN NOW..
I TAKE IT YOU HEARD EVERYTHING?
ALL RIGHT, ZEK, WE PLAYED IT YOUR WAY AND IT WORKED--
BUT IF YOU'RE PLANN'N' ON MAKIN A CAREER IN THIS BURG
-I'D KEEP MY NOSE CLEAN FROM NOW ON IF I WAS YOU.
DON'T WORRY, BOYS--I'VE GOT WHAT I WANT I'LL BE MOVING UP THE LINE NOW.
(GOOD I HATE PRIVATE PEEPS
"IT WAS ALL WINDING DOWN TO THE MOMENT I DREADED.
"MY SCRAMBACK HAD PASSED FOR A WEIRD WRISTWATCH, BUT NOW IT WAS TIME TO TAP ITS TRUE FUNCTION..
IT'S A WRAP, HEAD TIME'S SAVED--OR SOON WILL BE. GUESS I'LL BE COMING HOME TO THE ACE NOW
YOU SOUND RELUCTANT, ACE.
DON'T FORGET TIME'S A-WASTING--NO GOODBYES, NO REGRETS.
YEAH. NO GOODBYES..
"IT TOOK LESS THAN AN INVERTED SECOND--
"--BEFORE EVERYTHING SCRAMMED BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS AND SHOULD HAVE BEEN.

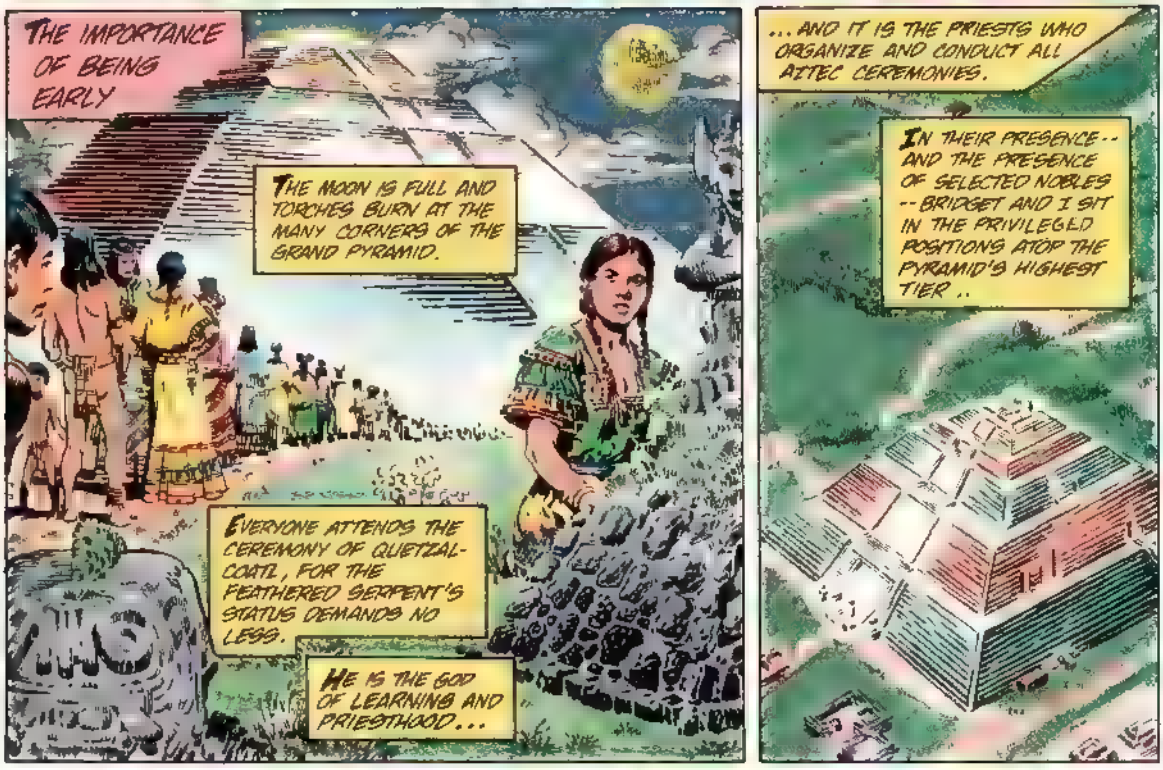
. BUT AS FOR REGRETS, HEAD ...I WILL MISS HER.
NO DOUBT ABOUT IT - THE FEATHERED SERPENT CAME IN A POOR SECOND.
BUT WHAT COULD I DO?
WHEN ONE IS AN AZTEC, ONE CAN ONLY CLUTCH THE GOLD AND SIGH..
AND DO AS THE AZTECS DO
"SO I LEPT, HITTING THE FOG OF GEARY STREET FOR THE LAST TIME.
"BUT STILL, HOW DO YOU SAY FAREWELL TO SOMETHING THAT WAS NEVER YOURS TO BEGIN WITH? HOW DO YOU REMOVE YOURSELF FROM THE SLIPPERY MOOD OF A MIST YOU WILL NEVER BREATHE AGAIN...?
"IT CALLED FOR A LONG GOOD-BYE OR NONE AT ALL, JUST LIKE AN AZTEC.
"THE ONLY TROUBLE WAS...
I'M NOT AN AZTEC.
"MY EYES AND EARS, HOWEVER, ARE HARDLY READY TO BE TURNED IN FOR BETTER MODELS...
".. AND EVEN THROUGH THE THICK SWIRL OF FOG I COULD SEE THE CAT WASN'T WEARING HIGH HEELS.
CLIK-CLAK! CLIK-CLAK!
CLIK-CLAK!
"LIKE A SNAKE, I SLITHERED FOR SHADOWS--
CLICK CLAK
CLICK-CLA
CLICK
CLAK!
".-AND WATCHED WITH THROAT-CAUGHT BREATH AS SHE WENT STRAIGHT FOR MY OFFICE.
"IT WASN'T THERE, OF COURSE AND EVEN THOUGH THE MOVIE WOULDN'T BE MADE FOR TWO YEARS--
"--I STILL FELT LIKE BOGIE REALIZING HE'D NEVER SEE INGRID BERGMAN AGAIN.

"I WISHED I COULD SPREAD MY FEATHERS AND FLY AWAY.
WHAT THE--?
"AZTEC GRAPHICS'--?
AZTEC GRAPHICS 505
BUT IT IS OFFICE 505..
ZEK? ARE YOU--
EMPTY.
JUST ..A DREAM. ALL OF IT...TOO GOOD. TOO GENTLE... TOO STRONG...
.. TO BE ANYTHING MORE.. THAN A DREAM.
"I WONDERED...
"HOW MUCH LIKE ME WAS SHE?
"WOULD SHE WEEP?
"AFTER THE WONDER, I SHUT HER OUT AND CONCENTRATED ON MY SCRAMBACK...
"IT LIFTED THE MANHOLE COVER...
".. AND, LIKE A MAN--BUT FEELING FAR LESS THAN A MAN--I DROPPED DOWN THE HOLE INTO FILTH...
" AND LANDED IN A DIFFERENT KIND OF WONDER, COLDER AND MORE PRISTINE BY FAR.
"HEAD'S MUFFLED VOICE ECHOED FROM HIS BOX: 'NO GOODBYES, NO REGRETS.'

"I DIDN'T KNOW IT AT THE TIME, BUT MY CONCENTRATION MUST HAVE HAD A HUGE HOLE IN IT.
"THE LEVITATION LINGERED FAR TOO LONG...
WH-WHAT IN THE--?
CLICK CLAK
CLICK CLAK
CLICK CLAK
".. OR MAYBE IT WORE OFF FAR TOO SLOWLY.
KLANG
"HEAD STARTED TO CRANK UP THE AZURE CROSSTIME EXPRESS, BUT MY MIND WAS STILL IN THE FOG OF THAT OTHER TIME, OTHER PLACE...
".. STILL ON THE FACE I WOULD NEVER--"
I CAME BACK FOR YOU
WH-WHAT--? BRIDGET!
YOU CAME BACK FOR ME, AND NOW I'VE COME BACK FOR YOU.
YOUR SELECTIONS ARE PLAYED OUT, MR. ZEK.
AND YOU WERE GOING TO SHOW ME AROUND, REMEMBER?
IT IS A FACE...
PUMPKIN HEADS OFF TENOCHTITLAN
THEN THE ENTIRE CITY IS AN ISLAND?
MM - AND WE MEXICA ARE NOT ITS FIRST CITIZENS.
LONG BEFORE WE SETTLED HERE, TENOCHTITLAN WAS INHABITED BY THE ANCIENT AND HIGHLY MYSTERIOUS TOLTECS...
HEY, ACE -? I DIDN'T KNOW PUMPKINS COULD FLOAT...
AH, BUT THE DUCKS DO KNOW IT--
--WHICH IS WHY THEY'RE NOT ALARMED...




AND SOMETIMES, BRIDGET, A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE IS VERY HAZARDOUS.
IT SEEMS WE SHALL DINE ON ROAST DUCK AT TONIGHT'S FEAST
WHOOO...


THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARLY
THE MOON IS FULL AND TORCHES BURN AT THE MANY CORNERS OF THE GRAND PYRAMID.
EVERYONE ATTENDS THE CEREMONY OF QUETZALCOATL, FOR THE FEATHERED SERPENT'S STATUS DEMANDS NO LESS.
HE IS THE GOD OF LEARNING AND PRIESTHOOD...
...AND IT IS THE PRIESTS WHO ORGANIZE AND CONDUCT ALL AZTEC CEREMONIES.
IN THEIR PRESENCE -- AND THE PRESENCE OF SELECTED NOBLES -- BRIDGET AND I SIT IN THE PRIVILEGED POSITIONS ATOP THE PYRAMID'S HIGHEST TIER..

DROWNING HAS DENIED THE DUCK NONE OF ITS FLAVOR.
TALK ABOUT PUTTIN' ON THE RITZ, ACE..
THESE DUDES SPARE NO HORSES
"BRIDGET, IN ANOTHER YEAR OR SO, 'HORSES' WILL BE A VERY DIRTY WORD AROUND HERE."
"HUH?"
"CORTEZ AND HIS CONQUISTADORS WILL RIDE THEM."
OH.
SO ANYWAY, WHAT'S THIS FIESTA ALL ABOUT?
THE MEXICA AZTECS ALWAYS HOLD A RITUAL WHEN METZLI THE MOON HAS FINISHED HIS MONTHLY STAR-FEEDING WITH A FULL BELLY.
THE HONOR FALLS TO QUETZALCOATL TONIGHT...
BUT WAIT-- THE STATUE-- HERE IT COMES...
THE GLOW, YOU MEAN?
THE ONLY REMAINING EVIDENCE OF ITS THEFT AND RETURN TO THE VERY SAME MOMENT OF ITS THEFT..
...AND I DON'T THINK THE PRIESTS EVEN NOTICED.
YOU MEAN WE MET AND DID EVERYTHING WE DID BACK IN 940 ALL IN THE SPAN OF A GLOW--?
ALL IN A TWINKLING, BRIDGET
WHOOO...
AZTEC ZEST
"HEY, ACE? WHO'S THIS GLY?"
"HE, AH.. HE'S THE GUEST OF HONOR."
"OH MY GOD, ACE THEY'RE NOT GOING TO--"

BUT IT IS THEIR GOD, AND NOT BRIDGET'S, WHO RULES THIS NIGHT
HER WORDS ARE CHOKED DEEP IN HER BREAST AS THE OBSIDIAN KNIFE STRIKES SLIGHTLY LEFT OF CENTER, TWISTING TO PRY OPEN TWO RIBS...
...AND SOON, MOST OF THE MAN'S HEART IS SMEARED OVER THE SERPENT'S MOUTH.
I HAD TO SMILE, EVEN IF WITH A GRIM TWIST; TIME, IN ITS INFINITE WISDOM, HAD GIVEN ME A CUTE CUE BACK IN ZEK'S OFFICE.
A GOOD SACRIFICE--THE HEART WAS STILL BEATING WHEN QUETZALCOATL RECEIVED IT.
YOU...YOU BROUGHT THAT STATUE BACK ...SO THEY COULD DO THIS?!
"THE VICTIM CONSIDERED IT AN HONOR, BRIDGET--HIS GATEWAY TO A GLORIOUS AFTERWORLD OF REWARDS BEYOND HIS IMAGINATION."
BUT YOU KNOW BETTER THAN THAT! YOU COULD GET THEM TO CHANGE--
TIME IS A BIG PLACE, BRIDGET IF I TRIED TO CHANGE EVERYTHING WHICH OFFENDED MY PRIVATE MORALITY...
HELL, IF I TRIED TO CHANGE JUST ONE ERA'S NATURAL GESTALT, I'D HAVE TO SPEND MY ENTIRE LIFETIME IN ONE SINGLE GODFORSAKEN MONTH BURIED SOMEWHERE IN THE HICK BACKWATERS OF HISTORY...
...LIKE BAVARIA IN JUNE OF 1923. HITLER'S BEER HALL PUTSCH WAS THE START OF--
YOU..NEVER INTERFERE? YOU AND THAT EGG OF YOURS?
NOT IF I CAN HELP IT--AND NEVER IN A BIG WAY. AN END WILL COME TO ALL OF THIS SOON ENOUGH, IN 1519 AT THE HANDS OF EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION.
THE AZTEC EMPIRE WILL COME TO A SCREECHING HALT, HERE AT THE HEART OF THE ONE WORLD...

"...AND IT WILL HAPPEN AFTER THEIR VERY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH ANOTHER WORLD THEY NEVER KNEW EXISTED--UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE."
BUT STILL.. BY RECOVERING THAT SNAKE STATUE, IN A WAY YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT MAN'S DEATH.
IF THEY DIDN'T HAVE THE DOODAD IN THE FIRST PLACE--
--THEY WOULD HAVE TORN THEIR BLOOD-CRUSTED HAIR, GNASHED THEIR ROTTING TEETH AND SACRIFICED A THOUSAND POOR WRETCHES IN AN ATTEMPT TO APPEASE THE GOD WHO WAS SO DISPLEASED WITH THEIR REPRESENTATION OF HIM THAT HE MADE IT DISAPPEAR!
THEIR NUMBERS THUS DEPLETED, THEY WOULD BE MORE CAUTIOUS IN THEIR WAR WITH CORTES--AND THEY MIGHT EVEN WIN, KNOCKING THE HISTORY OF THIS HEMISPHERE TO HELL AND BACK AGAIN!
OKAY, SO YOU REFUSE TO INTERFERE WITH THEIR NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS, BUT I STILL DON'T SEE WHY.
THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS IS ALL WE'VE GOT. I DON'T WANT IT TO UNRAVEL AND FALL APART.
OH I DON'T MEAN I WOULDN'T STOP AN ACT OF SMALL, PERSONAL "EVIL" WHEREVER AND WHEREVER I FOUND IT--INDEED, THAT'S MY OVERALL DESIGN IN OPPOSING NINE CROCODILE'S TAMPERING WITH TIME...
BUT I'M NOT PREPARED TO VIOLATE THE TEMPORAL TAPESTRY OF ANY SOVEREIGN ERA THAT'S KROOK'S GAME--AND A NASTY ONE.

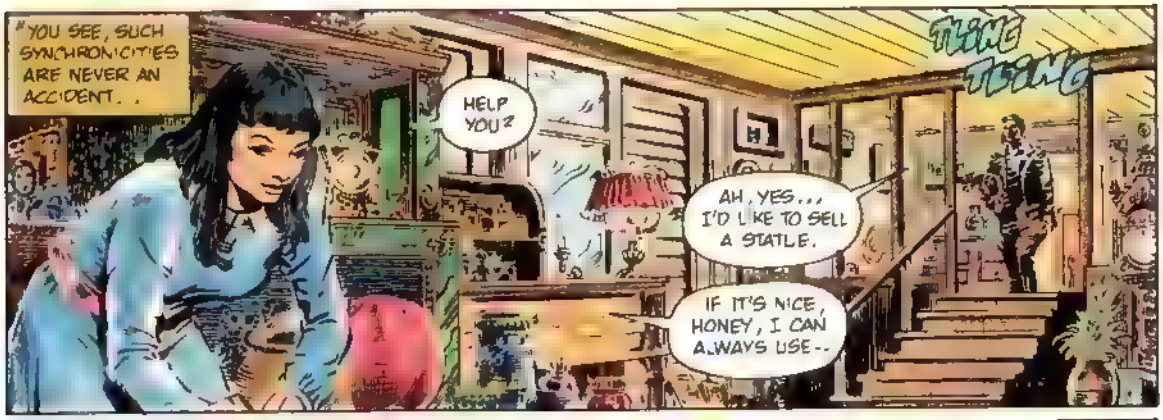
AND YOUR GAME IS--?
GOING FOR BROKE AND BREAKING THE HOUSE--SHUTTING DOWN KROK'S GAME--TRYING TO STOP HIM FROM INTERFERING WITH TIME IN A BIG WAY.
HUH?
BUT BECAUSE HE KEEPS MONKEYING WITH THINGS ON AN INTIMATE LEVEL--TRYING TO MURDER FRANKLIN BEFORE HE FLIES HIS KITE, FOR EXAMPLE...
...I GET INVOLVED IN LOW-LEVEL INTERFERENCE--IF IT IS SUCH.
IN MY TIMELINE'S HISTORY, OLD BEN WAS NOT MURDERED BEFORE HE FLEW HIS KITE--
--SO PREVENTING HIS MURDER CAN HARDLY BE CONSIDERED HISTORICAL INTERFERENCE...BUT PERHAPS FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE.
FRANKLIN WAS MURDERED? THERE'S MORE THAN ONE HISTORY?
I'M NOT SURE YET, BUT I SUSPECT SO. HEAD'S WORKING ON IT FOR ME, AND THE AZURE EXPRESS MAY BE ABLE TO EXPLORE THAT ANGLE...
TANGENTIAL FREQUENCIES ALL BEING EQUAL, THAT IS.
OY VEY BUT WHY WOULD THIS KROK WANT TO STIFF FRANKLIN?
TO DELAY THE "DISCOVERY" OF ELECTRICITY BY, WHO KNOWS?
TEN YEARS? A HUNDRED YEARS? EVEN A DAY - PERHAPS A MERE MOMENT - WOULD APPRECIABLY DIDDLE THE SCHEME OF THINGS.
DISASTROUSLY, I SUSPECT.
SO YOU'RE THE...WHAT? --THE ROBIN HOOD OF TIME?
HM..MORE LIKE ZORRO OR BATMAN...
THE PROTECTOR OF TIME--THE AVENGER OF TIME'S SUFFERING.

HMMM ..
WHAT'S WRONG?
FIVE'LL GETCHA TEN I'M GONNA REGRET THIS OFFER...
"BUT?"
YOU NEED A ROBIN, BATMAN?
MADAM, THERE COMES A TIME WHEN NEED AND WANT BECOME INSEPARABLE
OKAY SO I'LL SETTLE FOR WANT YOU WANT A SIDEKICK?
IF I DIDN'T, I WOULD HAVE KISSED 1940 GOODBYE FOREVER.
SO KISS ME HELLO, WHY DON'TCHA?
WHOOO...THE KIDS IN SAN FRANCISCO WILL NEVER BELIEVE THIS.
UH. YOU MAY NEVER SEE THEM AGAIN, BRIDGET...
THAT'S... RIGHT.. ISN'T IT?
SURE YOU STILL WANT TO BE A SIDE-KICK?
YOU BETCHUM, RED RYDER!
WHAT THE--?!
AYYO!

ACE! WHAT'S WRONG UP THERE? WHAT'S GOING ON--?!
"UH OH--I THINK I BLEW IT
TRIPPING TOLTECS
'YEP--AND I JUST CREATED ONE GREAT BIG BEAUT OF A TIME-SNAFU!"
COME ON--WE'VE GOT TO GO BACK AND PATCH UP THE HOLE BEFORE IT GETS ANY WORSE --AND BEFORE THE PRIESTS THINK TO PIN ME AS THE PARTY-SPOILER!
OTHERWISE KNOWN AS A PRIME PARADOX.
THEY ALREADY KNOW I'M WEIRD!

WE RACE BETWEEN MY TWIN PYRAMIDS, OUR GOAL THE ONE WHICH IS NOT MY DWELLING.
AND THIS TIME, SINCE THE TEMPORAL FLUX DOES NOT CARE FOR SNAKE STATUES COMING TO LIFE--
--IT IS MORE THAN A MEANS TO FRITOS..
WAIT A MINUTE! AREN'T YOU EVEN GOING TO TELL ME WHAT--
NO TIME, BRIDGET!
I'LL EXPLAIN ONCE WE'RE INSIDE THE AZURE EXPRESS AND SAILING THE GOLDEN MELD!
AN EGG IN TIME
THE GOLDEN WHO--?
MELD.
NOW JUST GET INTO THE EXPRESS, DAMMIT
I'VE PROGRAMMED THE SHELL TO YIELD TO YOUR MOLECULES...
IT'LL ACCEPT US BOTH NOW!
BOOM
FASTER, HEAD--FASTER!
AS YOU WELL KNOW, ACE, ALL TIME IS NOT ONLY RELATIVE BUT SUBJECTIVE AS WELL--DON'T LET PSYCHOLOGICAL HASTE GET THE BETTER OF YOU.
JUST HURRY, TEMPUS!
HEAD TOOK HIS BODY AND JAMMED US INTO THE MELD, TIME AND SPACE...
ALL RIGHT, ACE--TRANSFER TO MELD COMPLETE--WE'LL BE THERE WHENEVER YOU WANT TO GET OUT.
HISTORY NEVER FORGETS
OH, THIS IS THE GOLDEN MELD. WHY DIDN'T YOU JUST SAY SO? I REMEMBER THIS--IT TICKLES WAY DOWN LOW.
MAY I BE EXCUSED, ACE?
YES, GO BACK TO YOUR BOX AND LET US THINK.
NOW WILL YOU PLEASE EXPLAIN WHAT'S GOING ON?
FOOB
I FOCUSED ON THE END--ON LEAVING YOU--THAT'S WHAT SCREWED ME UP. IF I'D STARTED MY SCRAMBACK DICTATION AT THE BEGINNING...
..OR IN THE MIDDLE, AFTER I GOT THE FEATHERED SERPENT BACK FROM NINEKROK'S EBONAT!...

ONCE AGAIN IS MORE THAN ONCE
"I HADN'T EVEN THOUGHT OF THE NAME YET BUT I'D BE T.A ZEK BY TOMORROW
"RIGHT THEN, AS THE FUGITIVE OF THE HOUR, I HAD ENOUGH ON MY HANDS--THE RE STOLEN QUETZ. .
". AND THE DARK BOYS WERE AFTER ME
"--I CREPT OUT, SNIFFLING FOR HAVEN...
"I GAVE THEM THE SLIP JUST OFF AN ALLEY, AND THEY TOOK IT
"SO AS THEY SLIPPED DOWN THE ALLEY--
KRONOPOULOUS ANTIQUES
"..AND FINDING IT IN THE NAME AND NATURE OF YOUR SHOP


"YOU SEE, SUCH SYNCHRONICITIES ARE NEVER AN ACCIDENT. .
HELP YOU?
TING TONG
AH, YES.., I'D LIKE TO SELL A STATLE.
IF IT'S NICE, HONEY, I CAN ALWAYS USE--

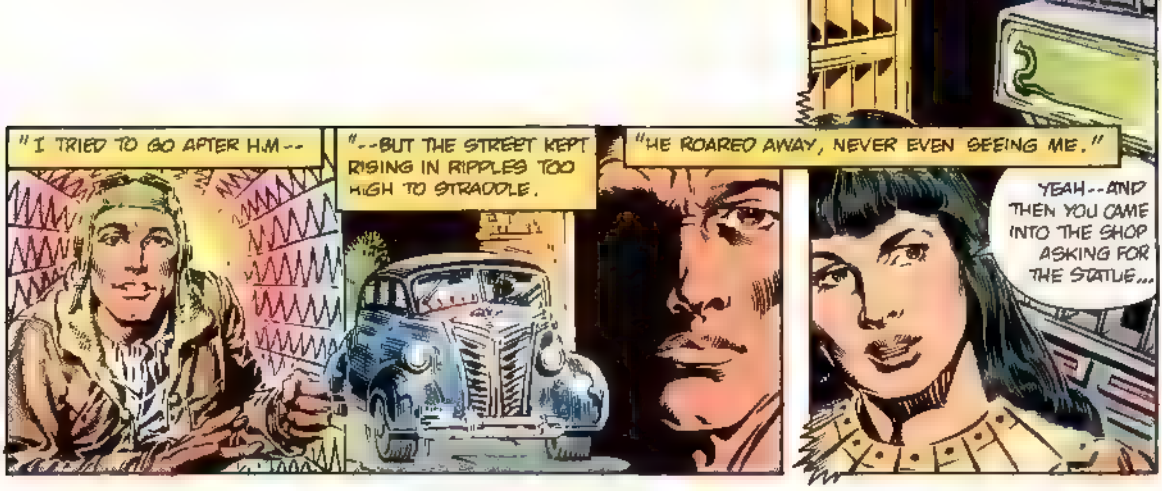
WHOOO... YOU GOTTA BE KIDDIN', MISTER--THIS AIN'T KING'S ROAD IN LONDON, Y'KNOW. THE WORD "ANTIQUES" IS A EUPHEMISM IN THIS PART OF TOWN...
I DEAL IN SECOND-HAND JUNK...
AND IF THAT PIECE IS THE REAL GLITTER I THINK IT IS...
THEN JUST GIVE ME 50 DOLLARS--20 DOLLARS--AND KEEP IT SAFE.
I'LL RECLAIM IT FOR A HUNDRED BUCKS.
YEAH? THIS AIN'T NO PAWN SHOP, BUD. AND WHAT IF YOU DON'T COME BACK?
YOU SMELLED SOMETHING SHADY, ALL RIGHT--YOUR NOSE EVEN WRINKLED.

"I LET THE WEIGHT FILL YOUR HANDS
BUT--
THEN IT'S YOURS TO KEEP.
NOW JUST TAKE IT
HEY!
YOU FORGOT YOUR TEN BUCK
I KNOW-- I TRUST YOU
"AND I DID."
I STILL DO, BRIDGET, EVEN HERE AND NOW-- WHEN EVERY MOMENT MEANS MORE
SHE LETS IT HANG IN THE AIR, PERHAPS TOO EMBARRASSED TO RESPOND...
.. CHOOSING INSTEAD TO PICK UP THE DAWNING NARRATIVE...
AND AFTER YOU LEFT, I LUGGED THE STATUE INTO A PLACE MUCH LIKE THIS ONE HERE ABOARD THE EXPRESS.
"--THE REAR STOREROOM OF MY ANTIQUE SHOP
WEIRD BIRD.
NOT TOO CHINTZY ON THE CUTES, THOUGH...
...AND BY THE WEIGHT OF THAT THING, IT'S GOTTA BE FOR REAL.
BETTER STASH IT IN THE SAFE OR THE LOW-LIFES IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD'LL...
TLING TLING
DAMN--SOMEONE JUST CAME IN
BETTER HURRY BEFORE I GET ROBBED BLIND OUT THERE...
HOLD IT, BABE.
:...hhh:
"MY HEART JUMPED TWO FEET INTO MY MOUTH.

"BUT IT WAS ONLY HIM.
HEYYY, BABY.
HEY, RINALDO
LOOKIN' GOOD, BABY.
REAL SWEET, Y'KNOW?
LONG TIME NO SEE.
ONLY ABOUT A MONTH--SINCE YOU PROMISED ME DINNER THE NEXT NIGHT.
YOU KNOW HOW IT IS, BRIDGE...
I BEEN BUSY.
SO...WHATCHA GOT THERE?
SOME-THIN' THAT'D LOOK GOOD ON MY MANTEL.
NO DICE, RINALDO.
I'M ONLY BABYSITTIN' THE THING.
GUY'S COMIN' BACK FOR IT.
SO?
PAY THE GUY OFF.
YOU COULDN'T KEEP IT FOREVER.
:NNGHH:
YOU GOT BILLS TO PAY--HADDA SELL IT
WELL...
SURE.
TRUST ME, BRIDGE--IT'S A HOT ITEM ANYWAY.
"THE CASH CRACKLED BETWEEN US
NOW WRAP IT UP FOR ME, WILLYA, BABE?
I'LL BE WAITIN' OUT FRONT.
"AFTER HE LEFT I COULDN'T DECIDE WHICH HAD THE MOST WEIGHT--THE STATUE A STRANGER HAD PLACED IN MY HANDS...
"...OR THE CASH WHERE RINALDO HAD STUFFED IT.

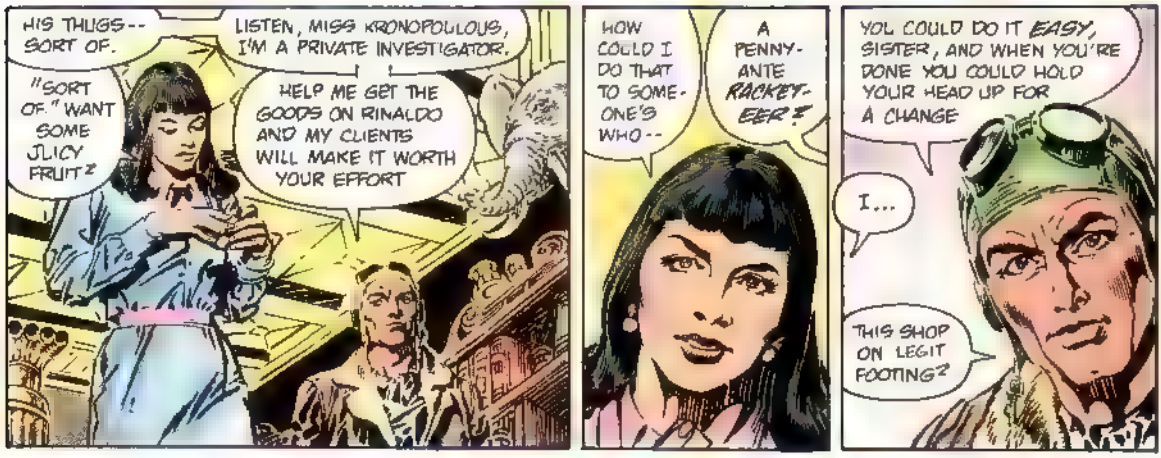
"EVEN FOR ME, IT WASN'T A SNAP DECISION.
"TOOK A WHOLE MINUTE OR TWO. .
"BUT THAT WAS ONLY THE SPOOK OF LONG-DEAD CONSCIENCE FIGHTING TO LOSE.
"SO I FLIPPED RINALDO'S BUCKS INTO THE SAFE AND WRAPPED SOME TISSUE AROUND HIS PURCHASE.
"MAYBE IT WOULD LOOK SWELL ON HIS MANTEL... BUT IT'S FUNNY HOW MUCH HEAVIER PAPER CAN GET WHEN YOU DYE IT GREEN AND STICK SOME NUMBERS ON IT."
I DON'T BLAME YOU FOR YOUR DECISION, BRIDGET.
YOU COME FROM TOUGH TIMES.
BUT NOW COMES THE DOXIE-BOTCH-- THE POINT IN TIME WHERE I BLEW IT...
"WHILE YOU WERE DEALING A FATAL BLOW TO YOUR CONSCIENCE--
HWAK
"--I WAS OUT IN THE ALLEY, WINNING MY OWN FIGHT AGAINST EBONATI THUGS--
THUK
SHOKT
"--BUT ONLY WHILE PAYING THE PRICE OF PAIN.
"I SLIMPED UNDER YOUR REAR WINDOW-- THE ONE THAT LOOKS IN ON THE BACK STOREROOM...
". AND SOMETHING INSIDE CAUGHT MY EYE...
55
MUH--?
OUFF
WHUD

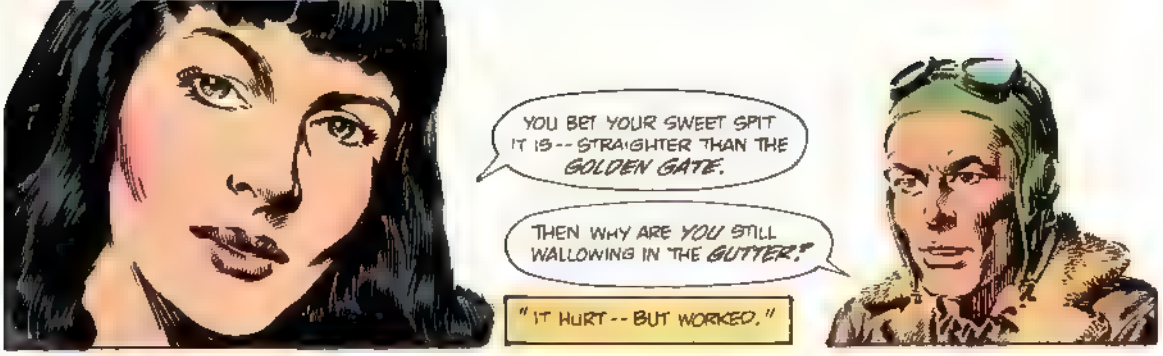
"I COULD SEE YOU IN THERE, BRIDGET, RUMMAGING AROUND FOR SOMETHING.
"I KNOW NOW THAT IT WAS A BOX OF THE RIGHT SIZE FOR RINALDO'S PURCHASE.
"BUT IT WAS SOMETHING ELSE THAT DISTRACTED ME..
"ANOTHER FIGURE TOO SHADOWED TO CLEARLY SEE, BUT SOMEHOW FAMILIAR.
"HE WAVED TO ME, A KIND OF WRY OR JAUNTY SALUTE--AND I FORGOT ABOUT MY FIGHT
"A MISTAKE...
WOP
UHNNNN...
"WHICH ANGERED ME.
DIRTY FIGHTING FROM EBONATI I EXPECT..
BUT STUPIDITY IN MYSELF--
--MUST BE PURGED.
CHUD
"IT WAS ANOTHER TWO MINUTES BEFORE THE LAST SHADOW-KNIGHT FELL.
"I STAGGERED--WHEN I WASN'T STUMBLING--DOWN THE ALLEY TOWARD THE FRONT OF YOUR SHOP, TRIUMPHANT BUT HARDLY LOOKING OR FEELING IT.
"WHEN I HIT THE BUCKLING STREET--
"--IT WAS ALL CRAZY ANGLES DONE IN THE WRONG COLORS--
"--AND RINALDO WAS SKIPPING FROM YOUR FRONT DOOR TO HIS CAR, HOLDING A BOX BIG ENOUGH FOR A GOLD SNAKE.

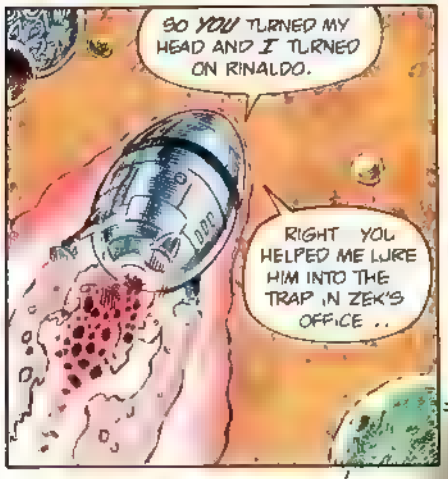

"I TRIED TO GO AFTER HIM--
"--BUT THE STREET KEPT RISING IN RIPPLES TOO HIGH TO STRADDLE.
"HE ROARED AWAY, NEVER EVEN SEEING ME."
YEAH--AND THEN YOU CAME INTO THE SHOP ASKING FOR THE STATUE...

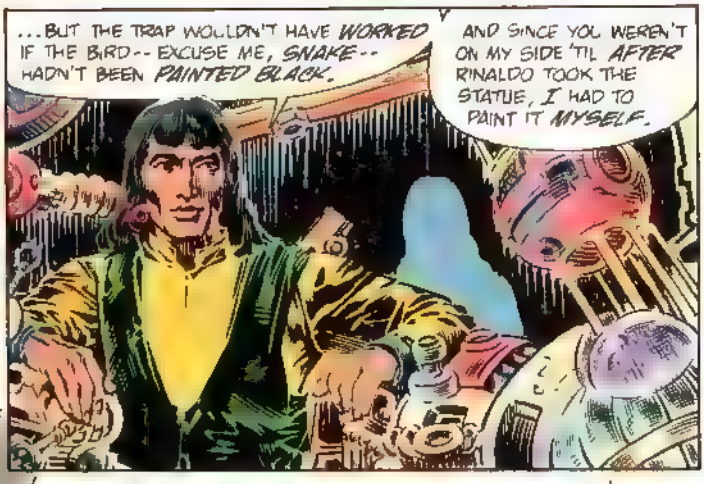
"...SO BADLY BEATEN YOU COULD BARELY STAND.
QU--QUETZALCOATL..
MONEY MEANS NOTHING TO ME, LADY.
BUT I TELL YOU I DON'T HAVE IT, FRIEND. I'LL MAKE IT UP TO YOU WITH--
WHO DOES HAVE THE SERPENT?
"SOMETHING ABOUT YOU GOT TO ME. I COULDN'T HELP MYSELF FROM ANSWERING...

RINALDO
YOUR BOYFRIEND?
WE GET COZY NOW AND AGAIN, BUT WHAT'S THAT GOT TO DO WITH--
WAS MY FACE A LUMP WHEN I FIRST CAME IN HERE? WHAT KIND OF SUGAR DADDY DO YOU THINK RINALDO IS?
SO HE AIN'T STRICTLY LEGIT, BUT..RINALDO DID THAT TO YOU?

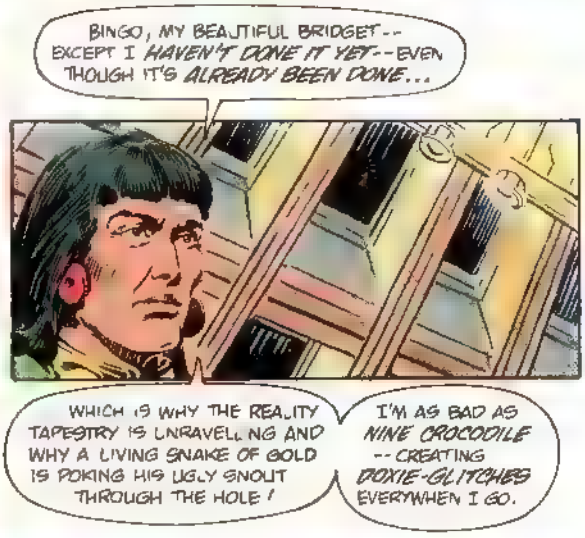

HIS THUGS--SORT OF.
LISTEN, MISS KRONOPOULOUS, I'M A PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR.
"SORT OF." WANT SOME JUICY FRUIT?
HELP ME GET THE GOODS ON RINALDO AND MY CLIENTS WILL MAKE IT WORTH YOUR EFFORT
HOW COULD I DO THAT TO SOMEONE'S WHO--
A PENNY-ANTE RACKETEER?
YOU COULD DO IT EASY, SISTER, AND WHEN YOU'RE DONE YOU COULD HOLD YOUR HEAD UP FOR A CHANGE
I...
THIS SHOP ON LEGIT FOOTING?


YOU BET YOUR SWEET SPIT IT IS -- STRAIGHTER THAN THE GOLDEN GATE.
THEN WHY ARE YOU STILL WALLOWING IN THE GUTTER?
"IT HURT -- BUT WORKED."

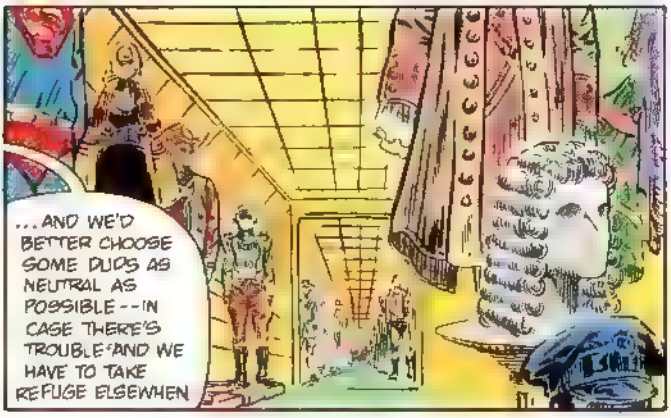

SO YOU TURNED MY HEAD AND I TURNED ON RINALDO.
RIGHT YOU HELPED ME LURE HIM INTO THE TRAP IN ZEK'S OFFICE ..

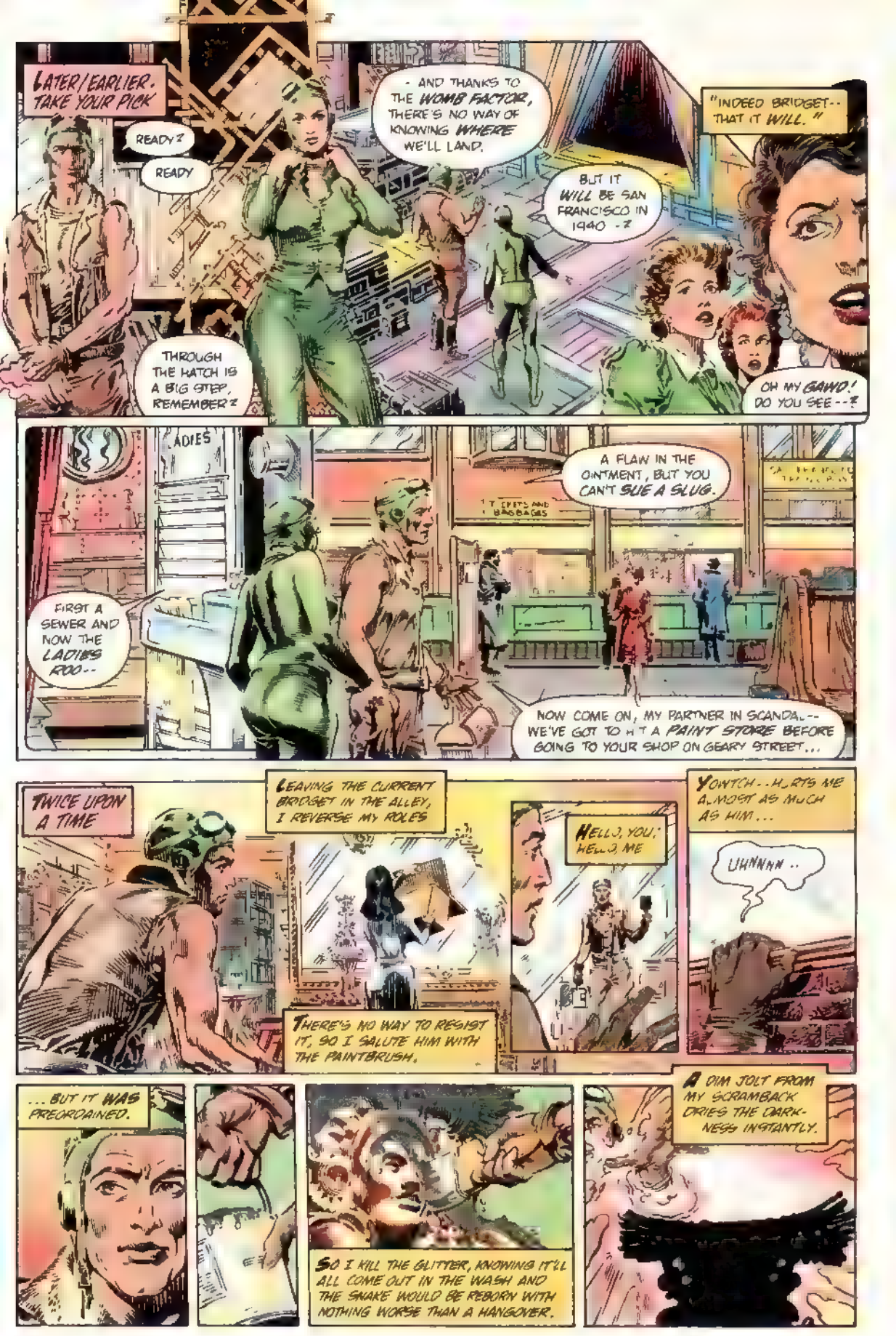

...BUT THE TRAP WOULDN'T HAVE WORKED IF THE BIRD -- EXCUSE ME, SNAKE -- HADN'T BEEN PAINTED BLACK.
AND SINCE YOU WEREN'T ON MY SIDE 'TIL AFTER RINALDO TOOK THE STATUE, I HAD TO PAINT IT MYSELF.

THEN...THE SHADOWY FIGURE YOU SAW -- WHILE I WAS SCROUNGING FOR A BOX...!
HE PAINTED THE STATUE BLACK AND REWRAPPED IT IN THE TISSUE PAPER WHILE I WASN'T LOOKING -- AND HE WAS YOU!


BINGO, MY BEAUTIFUL BRIDGET -- EXCEPT I HAVEN'T DONE IT YET -- EVEN THOUGH IT'S ALREADY BEEN DONE...
WHICH IS WHY THE REALITY TAPESTRY IS UNRAVELLING AND WHY A LIVING SNAKE OF GOLD IS POKING HIS UGLY SNOUT THROUGH THE HOLE!
I'M AS BAD AS NINE CROCODILE -- CREATING DOXIE-GLITCHES EVERYWHEN I GO.

I...SEE...WHICH IS WHY WE HAVE TO GO BACK NOW ...OR THEN, ANYWAY.
CORRECT -- BUT FIRST STOP IS THE INFINITY CLOSET...

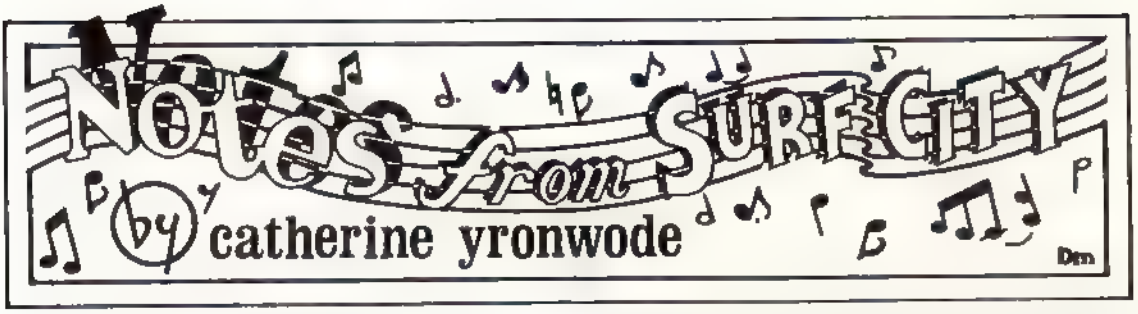

...AND WE'D BETTER CHOOSE SOME DUDS AS NEUTRAL AS POSSIBLE -- IN CASE THERE'S TROUBLE AND WE HAVE TO TAKE REFUGE ELSEWHEN


LATER/EARLIER. TAKE YOUR PICK
READY?
READY
THROUGH THE HATCH IS A BIG STEP, REMEMBER?
- AND THANKS TO THE WOMB FACTOR, THERE'S NO WAY OF KNOWING WHERE WE'LL LAND.
BUT IT WILL BE SAN FRANCISCO IN 1940 -?
"INDEED BRIDGET-- THAT IT WILL."
OH MY GAWD! DO YOU SEE--?
LADIES
A FLAW IN THE OINTMENT, BUT YOU CAN'T SUE A SLUG.
FIRST A SEWER AND NOW THE LADIES ROO--
NOW COME ON, MY PARTNER IN SCANDAL-- WE'VE GOT TO HIT A PAINT STORE BEFORE GOING TO YOUR SHOP ON GEARY STREET...
TWICE UPON A TIME
LEAVING THE CURRENT BRIDGET IN THE ALLEY, I REVERSE MY ROLES
HELLO, YOU; HELLO, ME
YOWTCH--HURTS ME ALMOST AS MUCH AS HIM...
UHNNNN..
THERE'S NO WAY TO RESIST IT, SO I SALUTE HIM WITH THE PAINTBRUSH.
...BUT IT WAS PREORDAINED.
SO I KILL THE GLITTER, KNOWING IT'LL ALL COME OUT IN THE WASH AND THE SNAKE WOULD BE REBORN WITH NOTHING WORSE THAN A HANGOVER.
A DIM JOLT FROM MY SCRAMBACK DRIES THE DARKNESS INSTANTLY.

SORRY FOR THE LUMP, MY DOPPELGANGER, BUT IF I HADN'T SEEN ME THEN--
--HOW COULD I TIE THE LOOSE END NOW?
SO I REWRAP THE TISSUE PAPER AND SPLIT BEFORE SHE TURNS WITH THE BOX
LET RINALDO ROAR OFF WITH IT; THE SNARE HAS BEEN SET.
MORE THAN ONE WAY TO MELD THE GOLD OR: TWINKLE, TWINKLE, LITTLE TIMETRAIL...
EASIER TO WAIT HERE AND AMBUSH HIM WHEN HE RE ENTERS THE MELD...
IT'S HIS TRAIL, ALL RIGHT-- HE'S BACK IN FRISCO 1940-- DO WE GO AFTER HIM?
HAVING SNUCK PAST BRIDGET-THEN OUT THE FRONT DOOR, I PEER DOWN THE ALLEY TO SEE BRIDGET-NOW WATCHING MY OTHER SELF TAKE AND DEAL PAIN...
I CALL TO HER..
GUD
WHUD!
HEY GOGGLES -
--LET'S GO.
NEVER KNEW RINALDO TO MIX WITH PUGS LIKE THEM.
EBONATI.
AT THE TRAIN STATION, THERE IS A LINE FOR THE LADIES ROOM.
BRIDGET SNICKERS.

1
HOME BASE-- MONTEZUMA CONTERMINOUS
TAPESTRY'S PATCHED, HEAD
DESTINATION?
2
FINALLY WE ENTER OUR STALL INTO THE A'E.
EBONITI WARSHIP, ACE-- WE TRIPPED RIGHT INTO IT!
AMBUSH!
JUST GO A WHILE-- THEN SPIT US OUT AT ANY KEY CO-ORD
3
BUT AS SOON AS WE SLIP INTO THE MELD--
DON'T WANT 'EM FINDING THAT CO-ORD -- THE AZTECS'LL HAVE ENOUGH ON THEIR HANDS WITH CORTES.
JUST RUN, HEAD-- BUT SHORT OF BASE...
ORDERS?
DAMNED SLUG-SLIME-- IT ALWAYS LEAVES A TRAIL!
4
MAYBE THE BUGGERS WILL FOLLOW THIS TIME AND WE CAN DEAL WITH THEM THEN AND THERE!
5
BIG BEN'S BANGER
FOGGY... WHEN ARE WE, ACE?
DON'T LOOK AT ME. HISTORY WAS NEVER MY STRONG SUB--
YOU'VE GOT IT, PECKER HEAD-- BAIL OUT!
UH OH
WHEN'S NEXT?

6
I THINK WE'RE IN LONDON... AND SINCE IT'S A KEY CO-ORD, IT MUST BE A TIME IMPORTANT TO TIME...
...MEANING IT'S PROBABLY.. 1859
SUPERB JOB OF INSTAL-LATION, I SHOULD SAY--
YOU'LL HEAR IT SOON ENOUGH, SIR CHARLES, WHEN IT STRIKES THE QUARTER HOUR IN SOME SIX MINUTES...
7
--IF I COULD BUT SEE THE THING THROUGH ALL THIS DELCED FOG, EH WOT, BECKETT?
...YOUR INVENTION SHALL SET THE STANDARD FOR ALL TOWER CLOCKS OF THE FUTURE
8
AH, BUT WILL YOUR CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT STRIKE TRUE, BECKETT?
I SHOULD HOPE SO
OH COME NOW, EDMUND--AFTER DIVISING YOUR INGENIOUS DOUBLE THREE-LEGGED GRAVITY ESCAPEMENT, BE NOT SO MODEST.
9
BIG BEN-- WE MUST'VE POPPED OUT OF ONE OF THE BELL PORTALS UP THERE...
...FINDING OURSELVES DAMNED LUCKY TO LAND ON THIS LEDGE.
DO YOU THINK THEY'VE FOLLOWED US THIS TIME...?
10
TOO DARK IN HERE.
AND TOO MUCH WHIRRING AND RATCHETING-- COULDN'T HEAR THEM IF THEY WERE HERE
11
THAT CAN BE FIXED.
FRAK!
TIME STANDS STILL



"Next month we promise to introduce you to everyone in the office!" said Dean last month . . . just before leaving for New York City on a business trip.

Well.

I guess that means I get to write this Surf City, even though I'm neither Jan, Dean nor The Beach Boys

At least I'm in the office, which is more than I can say for some folks.

Actually, Dean is in an office . . . the New York office of Eclipse Comics, more properly known as Surf City East. New York is where the Business and Circulation departments of this cross-country company are located. Head business-person is Jan Mullaney. Readers, meet Jan . . . Jan, say hello to the readers. "Hi, folks!"

Gee, this is fun. I can make 'em say any darn thing I want 'em to.

Jan's the man who dickers with the distributors, deals with the dealers, raps with the retailers, and most importantly, Signs the Checks. A very important guy in the scheme of things. Jan's also a very talented musician and a professional one at that. When he's not Eclipsing, Jan is pursuing his second career, playing keyboards, producing records and writing songs. It's a busy life for Jan Mullaney.

Assisting Jan is Madelyn Feinberg. The New York office could hardly function without Madelyn. She answers the phone, handles subscriptions and takes care of the business-oriented mail. She also makes sure Jan-Boy doesn't forget to eat or sleep, what with his 48 hour-a-day schedule.

If Eclipse East takes care of business, I think I can safely say that Eclipse West has all the fun. Dean and I run the editorial office here in California. We work with the writers, artists, letterers and colourists to actually produce all the stuff Jan signs checks for and you folks buy.

The editorial office, however, wouldn't be what it is without the assistance of some very fine helpers.

James Shannon, Elgin Lessly and Alice Stockham are the unsung heroes of the Eclipse production department. They are responsible for all of those tiny little details nobody thinks about when they look at a beautifully drawn and printed comic book. Jimmy, Les and Alice handle chores like pasting up the lettercolumns and house ads, running the photocopy machine, getting all stats and typesetting together, checking art for errors (we can't leave the zipper tabs off of Rainbow's boots or the buckles off of Ms. Tree's trenchcoat!), and making sure that every page sent to the engravers is marked with the proper series title and page number. They also sweep the floors, open the mail, forward your letters of comment to the proper writers and artists, and, if we're lucky, make coffee for Dean and me. There is no more thankless task in the comic book industry than doing "production work." Alice, Les and Jimmy don't even ask for thanks. (They do want their paychecks every Friday, but that's a small price to pay for silent, uncomplaining service . . . and occasionally fresh coffee.)

Dean is, as most of you know, the other half of Jan-and-. He's Editor-in-Chief of this entire three-ring circus and that means everything from the decision (with Jan) of what to publish and when to publish it, right on down to proof-reading half the books rests on his furry little head. Dino doesn't sleep much. He's what you'd call a workaholic. As if editorial conferences and general overseeing were not enough, Dean also writes "The Scythe," which appears monthly in Ms. Tree.

Oh yes . . . and he has one other very important function here at Eclipse. Dino, bless his heart, is the self-appointed Guardian of the Fabulous Eclipse Record Collection. No muzak for us! This may be the only comic book company where the happy workers can get behind anything from Hoagy Carmichael's 1927 recording of Star Dust to Carl Perkins' 1955 out-takes of Blue Suede Shoes, with stops along the way for Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys, Jimi Hendrix, or the latest live George Shearing-Mel Torme disc

Yes, there are Editors-in-Chief who are taller than Dean, Editors-in-Chief who are older than Dean, and Editors-in-Chief who are bigger than Dean around the middle . . . but no where in comics will you find an Editor-in-Chief with a larger record collection than Dean's and nowhere will you find one who keeps the stereo going all day long and far into the night for the benefit of his employees!

That leaves yours truly to explain what the heck I'm doing here. Yes . . . well, I edit a few books myself (keep your eyes ready for Aztec Ace), do more than a little proof-reading, and I am also the person who runs the Colouring Department. I check all the colour work, oversee the separations made by the engravers, and hold my breath when the jobs go to press for fear something will go wrong. It rarely does, but I have a superstitious feeling that unless at least one person is worried, something really major will happen.

Oh yes, and if I'm left to manage the office in the absence of Our Fearless Leader, I get to do things like writing this here column. I also feed the Guinea Pig.

No lie. Eclipse Comics has an official Guinea Pig. Her name is Barbie Sue. She is an Abyssinian Agouti, and she is very sweet and unpretentious. What else can one say about her? She goes "Vreeep Vreeep" when she's hungry. She's like, a guinea pig, ya know?

And that, friends, is the low-down on Who's Who at Eclipse Comics. You may not know any more about us than you did before you began reading this, but if you think you do, you can thank or blame yours truly,

catherine yronwode
editor (and cowgirl emeritus)

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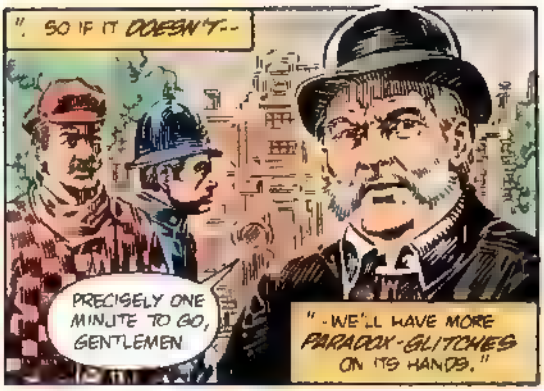
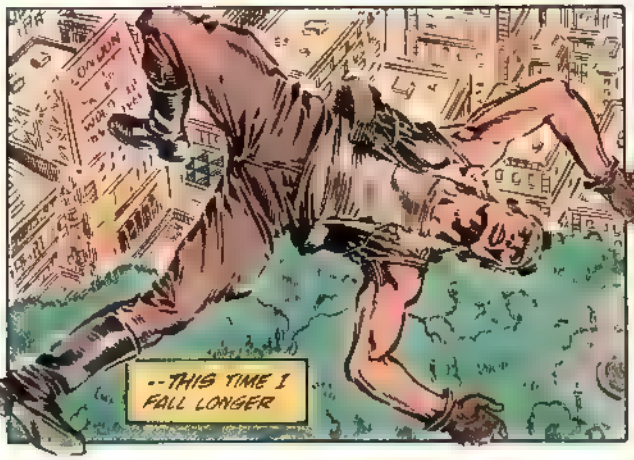
SUDDENLY IT'S QUIET...
M-HM I THINK OUR CLOCK 'JST--
--STOPPED. UHN!
ACE!!
IT SEEMS FOR A FROZEN MOMENT I WILL FALL FOREVER...
KAWUMPSH!
INSTEAD, I CATCH THE LEDGE--
- UNTIL BRIDGET STEPS IN.
--MERELY PROLONGING THE INEVITABLE--
SO WHERE'D YOJ LEARN MARTIAL ARTS?
CHINATOWN
ASK A STUPID QUESTION ..AND THE ANSWER WALLOPS YOU INTO CLICHÉ
CLIMB--THERE'S PROBABLY AT LEAST ONE MORE OF THEM... AND WE'VE GOT TO RE-START BIG BEN
HISTORY CLAIMS IT STRUCK TRUE ON ITS FIRST TEST..


", SO IF IT DOESN'T--
PRECISELY ONE MINUTE TO GO, GENTLEMEN
"--WE'LL HAVE MORE PARADOX-GLITCHES ON ITS HANDS."

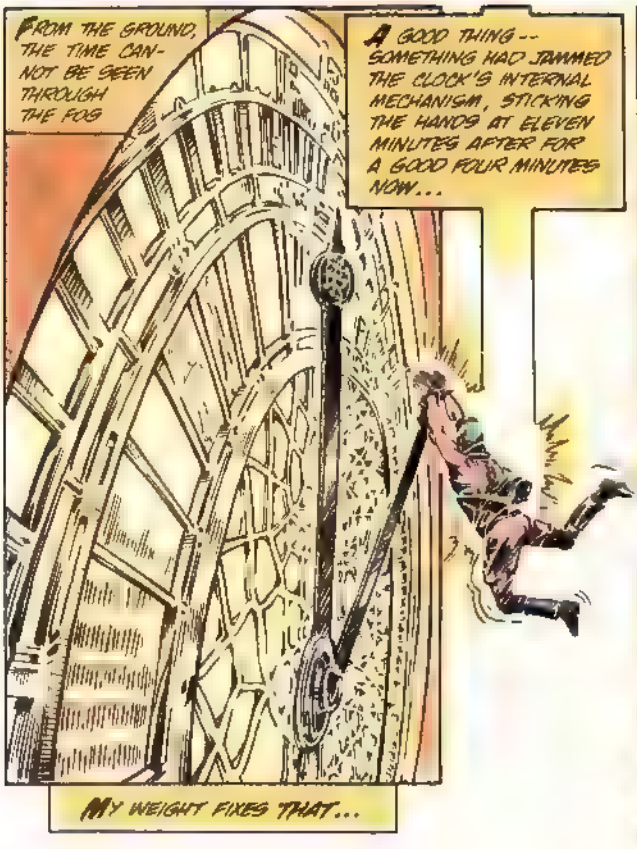
WE REACH THE BELL PORTALS, AND--
SHUNK
SHUNK

CLICK

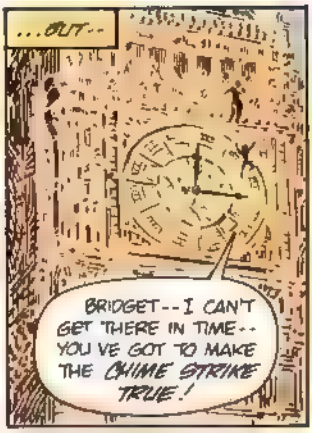

--THIS TIME I FALL LONGER

TEN SECONDS, GENTLE-MEN...

AT LEAST BRIDGET IS SAFE-- FOR THE TIME BEING.
LET GO OF ME, FEMALE!
DON'T I WISH I COULD, CREEP


FROM THE GROUND, THE TIME CAN-NOT BE SEEN THROUGH THE FOG
A GOOD THING -- SOMETHING HAD JAMMED THE CLOCK'S INTERNAL MECHANISM, STICKING THE HANDS AT ELEVEN MINUTES AFTER FOR A GOOD FOUR MINUTES NOW...
MY WEIGHT FIXES THAT...

KRAK
CLICK
WHIRRRR


...OUT--
BRIDGET--I CAN'T GET THERE IN TIME-- YOU'VE GOT TO MAKE THE CHIME STRIKE TRUE!

CLICK CLICK
EASY FOR YOU TO SAY, ACEY-DEUCEY...

WHIII

...IT LOOKS LIKE THIS.

FIVE-WORLDS POPPED INTO VIEW AS HEAD FROZE THE MOMENT -- AND BRIDGET WAS AWED TO THAT HAIR-RAISING SILENCE ALWAYS FOLLOWING A GASP.

I'D SUCKED AIR WITH PRICKLED SCALP, TOO, THE FIRST TIME I'D SEEN IT: FIVE CONCENTRIC LAYER-WORLDS, TUCKED ONE INSIDE THE OTHER, THE CEILING OF EACH STUDDED WITH ARTIFICIAL SUNS LIGHTING THE LAYER BELOW...

..OCEANS OF AIR PERMITTING TRAVEL FROM ONE WORLD TO THE NEXT, AND EVEN ALL THE WAY DOWN TO THE CORE.

IF YOU USED KEY DEVELOPMENT DEMARCATIONS TO CHOP ALL OF HISTORY INTO FIVE ERAS -- STARTING WITH THE FORMATION OF THE PLANET AFTER THE BIG BANG AND ENDING WITH MY "PRESENT" OF THE 23RD CENTURY -- EACH LAYER WOULD CORRESPOND WITH ONE OF THOSE FIVE ERAS.

APPROPRIATE PEOPLE -- ALBEIT INDIVIDUALS ALWAYS SHROUDED IN MYSTERY -- INHABITED EACH LAYER-WORLD. FOR EXAMPLE, GLENN MILLER AND AMELIA EARHART LIVED ON THE FOURTH LAYER OF FIVE-WORLDS.

THE CORE IS A GLOBE OF WATER PLIED BY GARGANTUAN CITY-SHIPS CROWED BY THE FRENATI

THE WHOLE THING WAS A SYMBOLLIC REALIZATION OF TIME, SPACE, HISTORY'S MYSTERY, AND THAT WHICH COULD UNRAVEL THE WHOLE BALL OF YARN, AN ONION WITH FIVE LAYERS AND A NASTY CENTER -- OR FIVE APPLES SHARING THE SAME WORM-RIDDLED CORE.

BUT DON'T ASK ME HOW IT CAME TO BE: I HAD OTHER PROBLEMS...

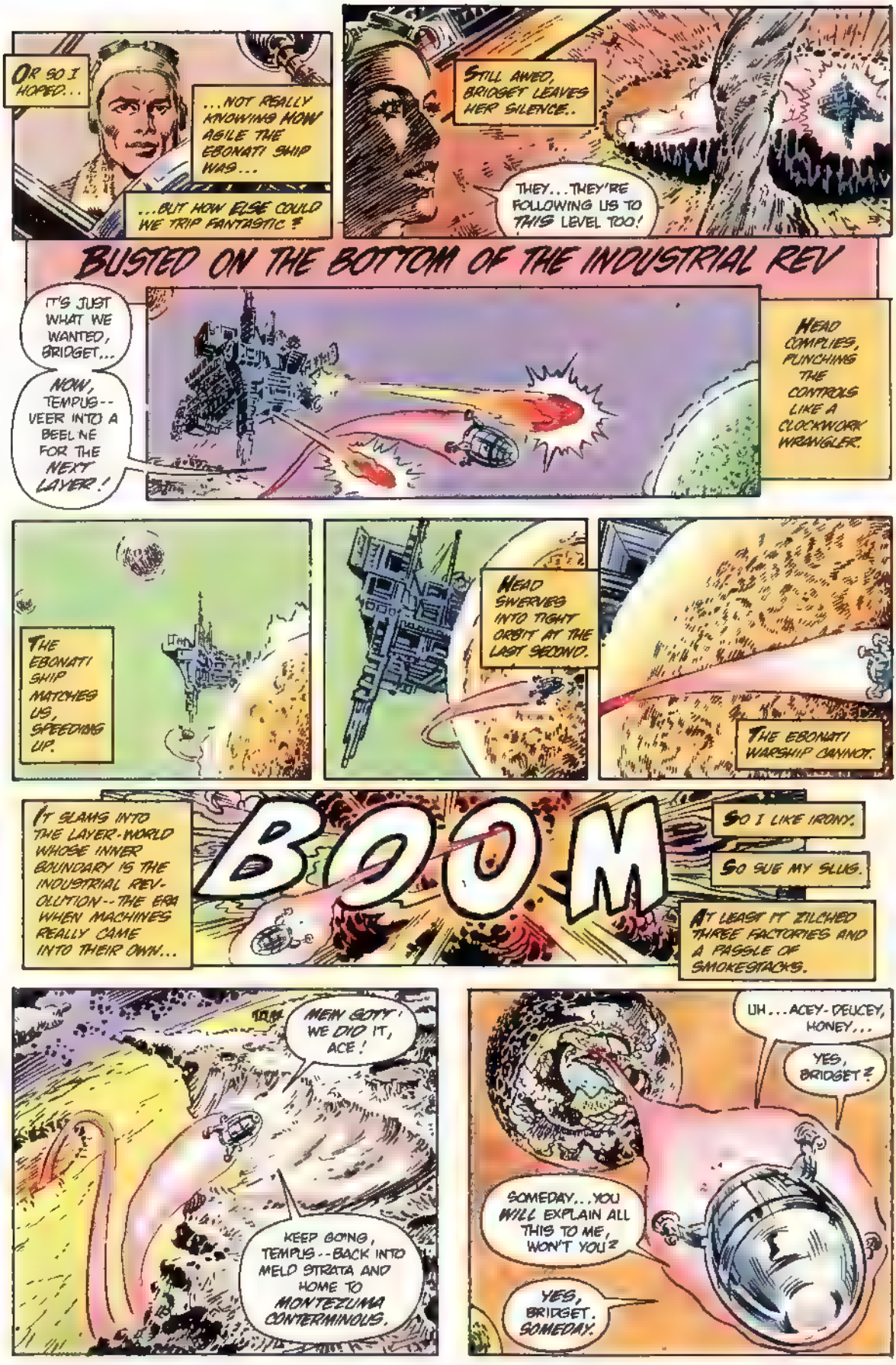
THROUGH THE OUTER SHELL, TEMPUS--FAST!

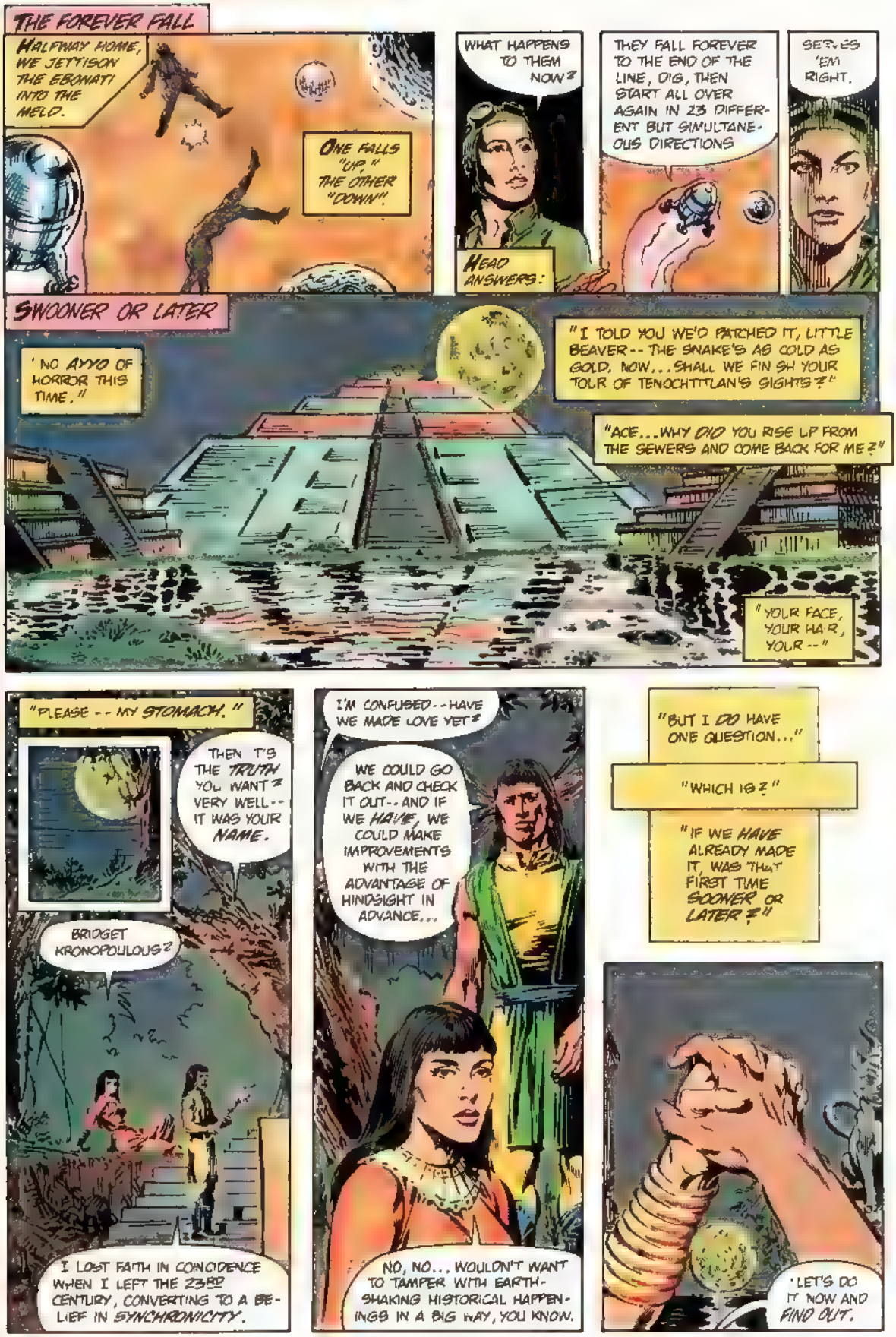
THAT'S IT -- NOW DO A LOOP-THE-LOOP DOWN TO THE *NEXT* LAYER-ERA!

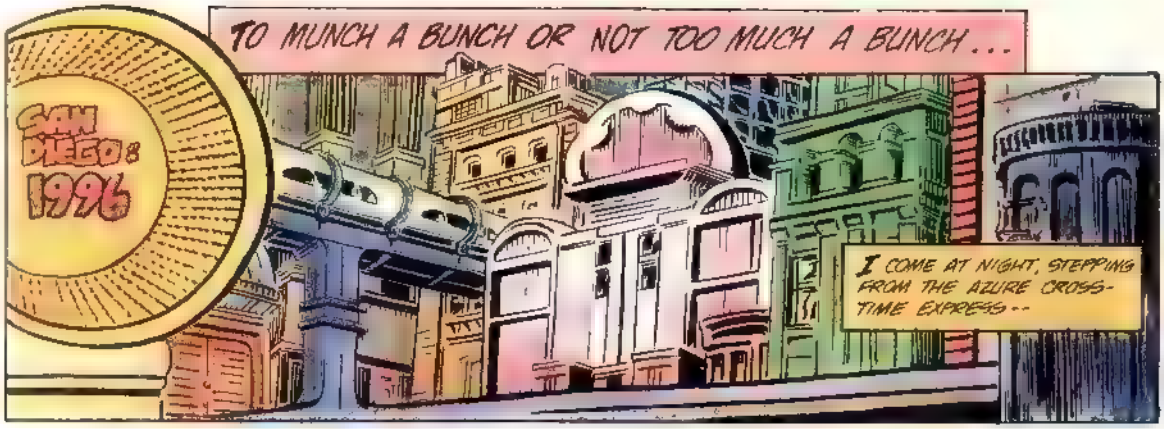
"ROGER, ACE -- BUT WE STILL HAVEN'T SHAKEN THEM!"

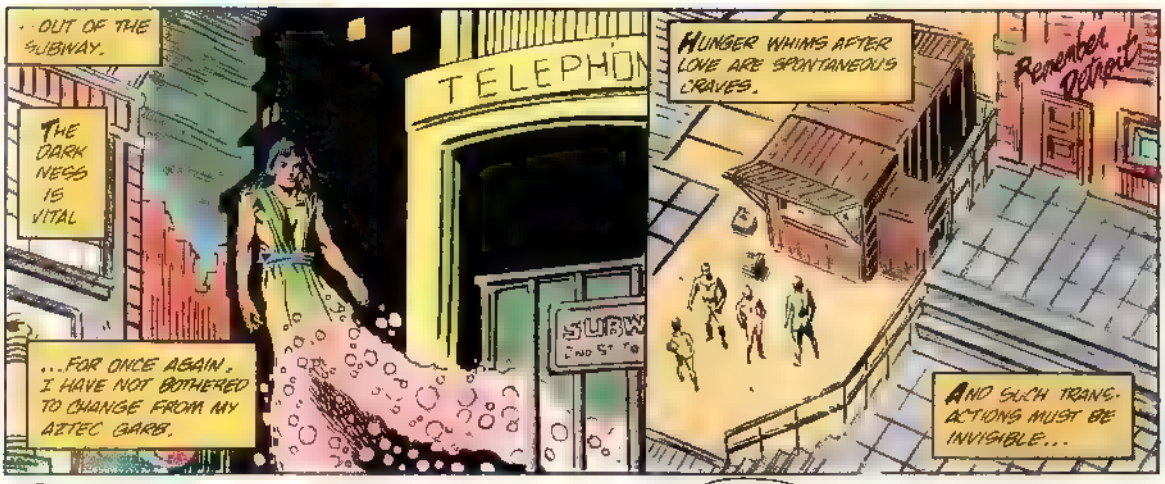
"JUST KEEP BARN-STORMING, HEAD!"

THEY'RE TOO BULKY TO WALTZ THE FANDANGO *WE* CAN DANCE!

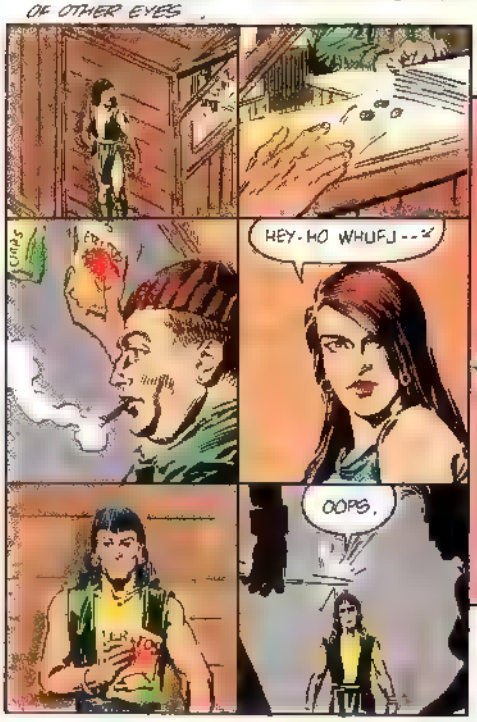

OR SO I HOPED...
...NOT REALLY KNOWING HOW AGILE THE EBONATI SHIP WAS...
...BUT HOW ELSE COULD WE TRIP FANTASTIC?
STILL AWED, BRIDGET LEAVES HER SILENCE..
THEY...THEY'RE FOLLOWING US TO THIS LEVEL TOO!
BUSTED ON THE BOTTOM OF THE INDUSTRIAL REV
IT'S JUST WHAT WE WANTED, BRIDGET...
NOW, TEMPUS--VEER INTO A BEELINE FOR THE NEXT LAYER!
HEAD COMPLIES, PUNCHING THE CONTROLS LIKE A CLOCKWORK WRANGLER.
THE EBONATI SHIP MATCHES US, SPEEDING UP.
HEAD SWERVES INTO TIGHT ORBIT AT THE LAST SECOND.
THE EBONATI WARSHIP CANNOT.
IT SLAMS INTO THE LAYER-WORLD WHOSE INNER BOUNDARY IS THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION--THE ERA WHEN MACHINES REALLY CAME INTO THEIR OWN...
BOOM
SO I LIKE IRONY.
SO SUE MY SLUG.
AT LEAST IT ZILCHED THREE FACTORIES AND A PASSLE OF SMOKESTACKS.
MEIN GOTT! WE DID IT, ACE!
KEEP GOING, TEMPUS--BACK INTO MELO STRATA AND HOME TO MONTEZUMA CONTERMINOUS.
UH...ACEY-DEUCEY, HONEY...
YES, BRIDGET?
SOMEDAY...YOU WILL EXPLAIN ALL THIS TO ME, WON'T YOU?
YES, BRIDGET. SOMEDAY.

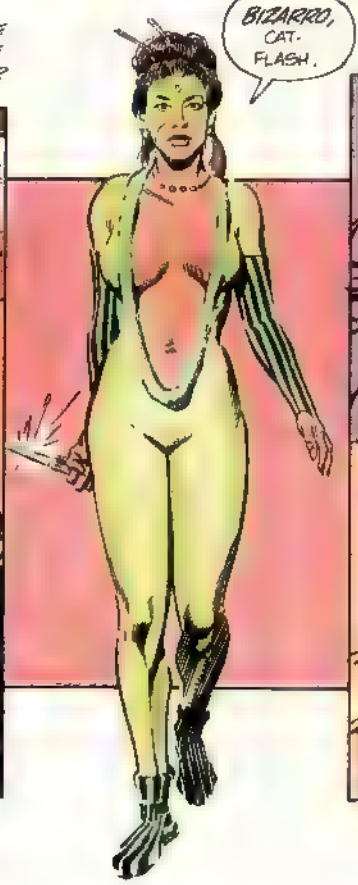

THE FOREVER FALL
HALFWAY HOME, WE JETTISON THE EBONATI INTO THE MELD.
ONE FALLS "UP." THE OTHER "DOWN!"
WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM NOW?
HEAD ANSWERS:
THEY FALL FOREVER TO THE END OF THE LINE, DIG, THEN START ALL OVER AGAIN IN 23 DIFFERENT BUT SIMULTANEOUS DIRECTIONS
SERVES 'EM RIGHT.
SWOONER OR LATER
"NO AYYO OF HORROR THIS TIME."
"I TOLD YOU WE'D PATCHED IT, LITTLE BEAVER -- THE SNAKE'S AS COLD AS GOLD. NOW... SHALL WE FINISH YOUR TOUR OF TENOCHTITLAN'S SIGHTS?"
"ACE... WHY DID YOU RISE UP FROM THE SEWERS AND COME BACK FOR ME?"
"YOUR FACE, YOUR HAIR, YOUR --"
"PLEASE -- MY STOMACH."
THEN IT'S THE TRUTH YOU WANT? VERY WELL -- IT WAS YOUR NAME.
BRIDGET KRONOPOULOUS?
I LOST FAITH IN COINCIDENCE WHEN I LEFT THE 23RD CENTURY, CONVERTING TO A BELIEF IN SYNCHRONICITY.
I'M CONFUSED -- HAVE WE MADE LOVE YET?
WE COULD GO BACK AND CHECK IT OUT -- AND IF WE HAVE, WE COULD MAKE IMPROVEMENTS WITH THE ADVANTAGE OF HINDSIGHT IN ADVANCE...
NO, NO... WOULDN'T WANT TO TAMPER WITH EARTH-SHAKING HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS IN A BIG WAY, YOU KNOW.
"BUT I DO HAVE ONE QUESTION..."
"WHICH IS?"
"IF WE HAVE ALREADY MADE IT, WAS THAT FIRST TIME SOONER OR LATER?"
"LET'S DO IT NOW AND FIND OUT.

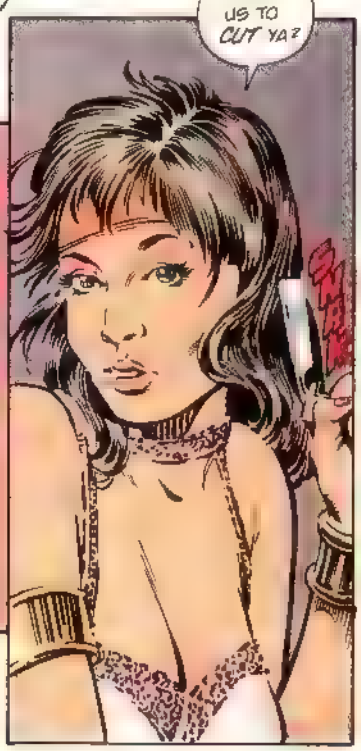




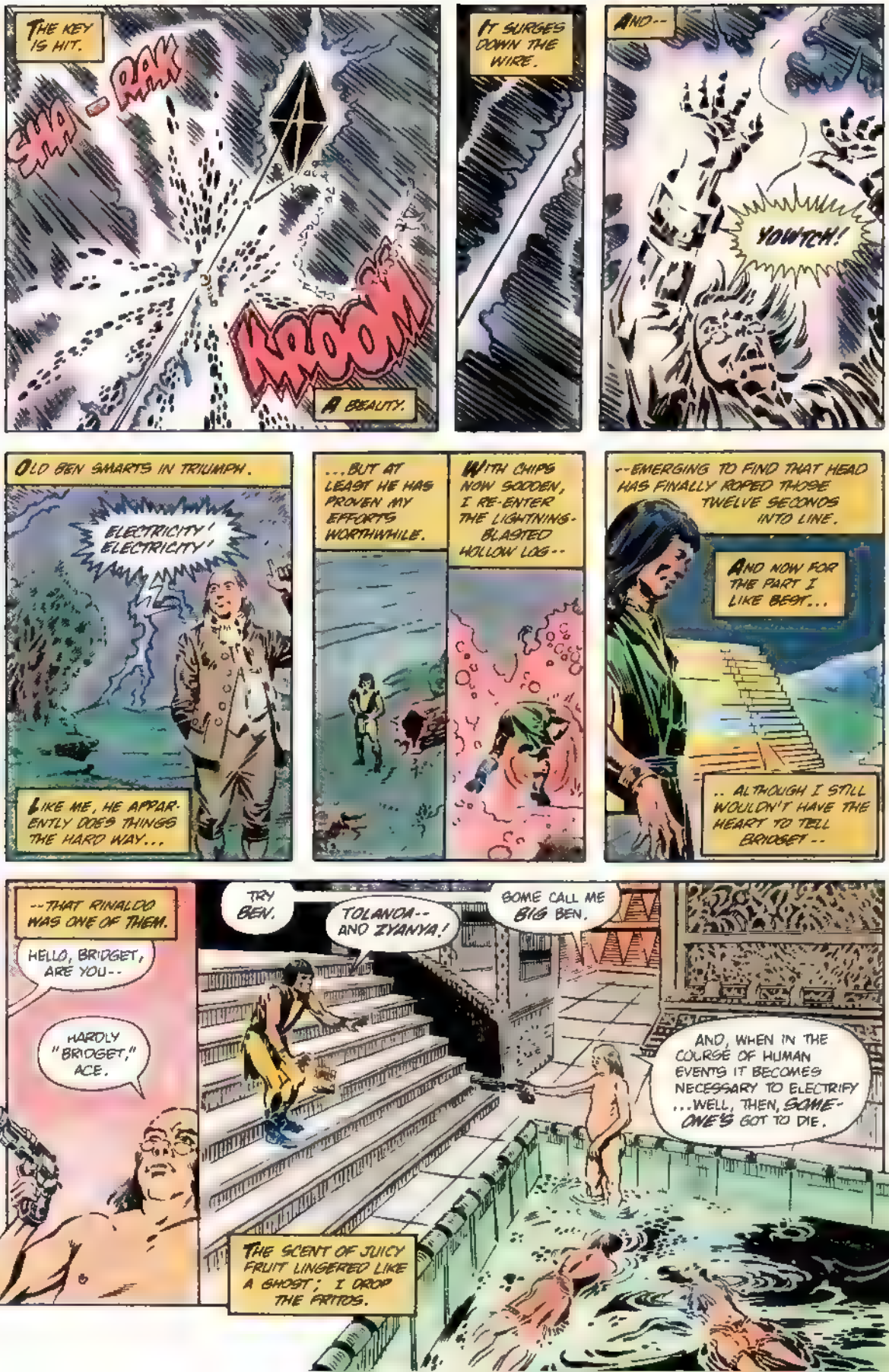
I SLIP THE COINS ONTO THE VENDOR'S COUNTER, SNATCHING THE BAG QUIETLY; THE VENDOR IS SNOOKERED, BUT THE GLINT OF MY AZTEC BRACELET CATCHES THE CORNER OF OTHER EYES.







AYYYYYO
HAH!!
'EY, EASY-OOSY, CAT-FLASH
IT WAS JUST AN OFFER.
TORMENTED SURFACE, MAN
BUT A HEART YOU COULD DIE FROM,
SO THE DARKNESS DID NOT WORK.
..NOR WAS I, TA..
SUBWAY
I. LEAVE.
WONDERING WHAT THE VENDOR WILL MAKE OF HIS UNEXPECTED TIMEFALL.
HEY HO!
THE COINS HAVE BEEN MINTED FROM PURE AZTEC--
GOLD?!!
HEYYY-HO!
NOW: ONE MORE SIDE JAUNT THROUGH THE ALSO GOLD MELD BEFORE
IT A DAY.
LONG BEFORE CREAM CHEESE:
PHILLY'S ELECTRIC KITE
IT IS, OF COURSE, A STORM OF SIGNIFICANCE...


THE KEY IS HIT.
SHA-RAK
KROOM
A BEAUTY.
IT SURGES DOWN THE WIRE.
AND--
YOWTCH!
OLD BEN SMARTS IN TRIUMPH.
ELECTRICITY! ELECTRICITY!
LIKE ME, HE APPARENTLY DOES THINGS THE HARD WAY...
...BUT AT LEAST HE HAS PROVEN MY EFFORTS WORTHWHILE.
WITH CHIPS NOW SODDEN, I RE-ENTER THE LIGHTNING-BLASTED HOLLOW LOG--
--EMERGING TO FIND THAT HEAD HAS FINALLY ROPED THOSE TWELVE SECONDS INTO LINE.
AND NOW FOR THE PART I LIKE BEST...
.. ALTHOUGH I STILL WOULDN'T HAVE THE HEART TO TELL BRIDGET --
--THAT RINALDO WAS ONE OF THEM.
HELLO, BRIDGET, ARE YOU--
HARDLY "BRIDGET," ACE.
TRY BEN.
TOLANDA-- AND ZYANYA!
SOME CALL ME BIG BEN.
AND, WHEN IN THE COURSE OF HUMAN EVENTS IT BECOMES NECESSARY TO ELECTRIFY ...WELL, THEN, SOMEONE'S GOT TO DIE.
THE SCENT OF JUICY FRUIT LINGERED LIKE A GHOST; I DROP THE FRITOS.

Disorientations 5:23

And so it will come to pass that Caza didst say unto Bridget: My past is your native time's future, and its face is stranger by far than any other unmasked beyond the veil of the Golden Meld.

And Bridget didst goggle at Caza: Whoa, Nellie! I'm from slow-scan 1940, remember? Let me see if I read you true, Acey-Deuce — — what you're trying to say is that your native time is weirder than any other time we'll ever vreeb to in the A.C.E.?

CAZA: To me, its memory evokes a reality randomly shaped by more of everything; it seems both more alien and more familiar, both colder and hotter, more materialistic yet more spiritual, more cunningly artificial but more artlessly natural, more bizarre while more mundane, more existential yet more . . . homey.

BRIDGET: All join hands and shuffle to the Rinky-Tink Paradox Rag. But how's this for a topper? San Francisco's more foggy than the Meld, yet on a clear day you can see all the way across the bay.

CAZA: Bridget . . .

BRIDGET: Sorry. Proceed, maestro.

CAZA: Memory aside, one thing about my hometime stood out then as starkly as it does now with the benefit of hindsight. Despite all its manifest and manifold wonders of technology and spirituality, the 23rd Century was too often ugly . . . a place and time of absurd harshness . . . goofy brutality.

BRIDGET: Whooooo.

CAZA: For example, when I was nine through fourteen, I lived through a five-year summer in which 300 million people perished as a casual result of crossed purposes and simple lack of nourishment. The Great Pan-African Famine was a long time in coming and presaged by numerous smaller, "warm-up" droughts and famines. When it was almost too late — — almost, but no brass coffin ring — — a mass movement of spontaneous altruism swept the rest of the planet, causing conscience-stricken "well fedders" to pledge half of their daily diet to those who were starving. The food philanthropists numbered well in excess of 300 million and their gift was open-ended, to be given as long as was necessary. It would have worked, too; no one needed to die. Indeed, the starving would have grown muscles while the fat would have become fit . . .

BRIDGET: What happened?

CAZA: No one knows with any degree of certainty. There were theories: Paranoia, suspicion, pride, passion, poison, racism, fear of agricultural contamination, bureaucratic idiocy, or perhaps computer estimates *dictating* that "nature" finally take its course in a centuries-delayed "weeding out" process.

BRIDGET: Uh, honey, I don't think I understand . . .

CAZA: Neither do I, Bridget . . . but for whatever reason . . . the gifts of food *were not allowed across the border without individual permits*. A separate permit for each and every potato, pomegranate, and persimmon. The crated food thus rotted while councils argued and people too weak to riot died. Ironically, the border guards seized and devoured the first shipments, giving them the vitality to enforce their orders.

BRIDGET: (rapt reaction of silent horror)

CAZA (dull monotone): Soon thereafter, in a panic of penance and obsolete precaution, protein was synthesized. The processing, however, demanded massive supplies of certain natural enzymes, the extraction of which quickly quickly led to the utter extinction of fruit-bearing plants in the wild. Orbiting hydroponic greenhouses produced enough of the enzymes to tastelessly feed earth's remaining human population . . . but by the time I was forced to flee from Krok's invasion of my lab, the repercussions along the natural food-chain were still not yet fully known. I'd remained indigenous only long enough to witness most of the planet's animal species die off . . . as well as the beginnings of a horrendous insect problem . . .

BRIDGET: Then the *reason* you invented the first time travel shift-vehicle . . .?

CAZA (nodding): It was obviously before Krok's Ebonati conclusively demonstrated to me that the past cannot be appreciably diddled with — — not without th simultaneously destroying past, present, *and* future. So, without that knowledge, I'd hoped to do the very thing I'm now trying to stop the Ebonati from doing — — *change the past*, by preventing the mass development of synthetic food and the consequent extinction of natural fruits. I'd hoped to journey back a relatively short distance in time and work a minor miracle, cutting through red tape or duplicity, as the case may have been, to feed the multitudes, thereby correcting shortsighted inaction by weeding out the event which triggered disasterous *overcompensation* for that very same shortsighted inaction. The only cure for complacency had become further complacency itself, entropically prolonged.

BRIDGET (awed): My God, Ace . . . it's almost too much to let *sink in*. Everything's *inside-out* now . . .

CAZA (wearily): Yes, the very nature of what I am and what I do — — as well as what Nine-Crocodile is and what he's done and will do — — is a snarled knot of irony and paradox. For example, were it not for Krok's first success on the warped road toward his goal — — invading my lab and forcing me to flee to Tenochtitlan — — *I would have unknowingly done his work for him*. For another example, my every waking moment is now devoted to *preserving* a past and future which in my opinion *must be changed*. And you can break it all down from there, into an infinity of other paradoxes, each of *them* able to be broken down into other pyramidal infinities of same. Sometimes — — perhaps alltimes — — I'm convinced that whatever reality *is* . . . whatever the configuration of existence may *be* . . . it is built on a *bedrock* of paradox . . . and any introduction of linear logic undermines its very foundations.

BRIDGET (confused): Huh?

CAZA: Systematic rationality is anathema to extant reality. Think of a snake eating its own tail; what happens when its mouth reaches its stomach?

BRIDGET (boggled): *Double*-huh?

CAZA: Okay, forget vicious circles and get down to basics. Think of a field cultivated year after year, either naturally or agrally. Without autumn and winter decay, nothing could grow in spring and summer. Don't you find it paradoxical that *life itself* is entirely dependent on *death?*

BRIDGET (crossing her eyes): oboy.

CAZA: Oh, *girl*. Life *is* death; death *is* life. Now make sense of either one.

BRIDGET (giving up): No, thanks. How 'bout some Juicy Fruit?

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- HEAVY METAL

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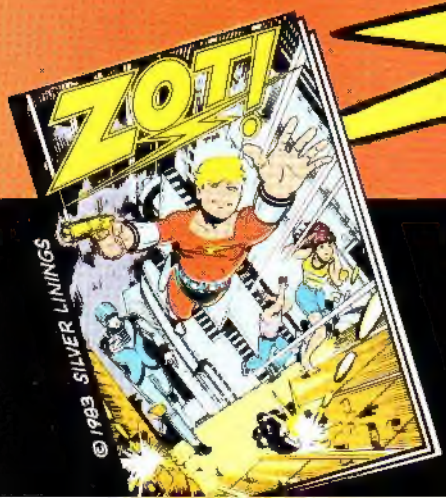

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